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Claremont McKenna College

**Mandate of Heaven:
An Analysis of China's Government Disaster Response and
CCP Performance Legitimacy**

submitted to
Professor Minxin Pei

by
Aaron Yang

for
Senior Thesis
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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the Chinese government's disaster response over the past two decades, analyze any patterns or recurring management behaviors, and understand the government's overall emergency response capability. Disaster response is one area that reflects the Chinese Communist Party's ability to govern and exhibit performance legitimacy. As an authoritarian regime, the CCP relies on repression and performance to maintain its authority, especially so when national disasters occur. During times of crisis, the CCP is expected to maintain control and minimize potentially negative consequences. Not doing so results in a potential image crisis and loss of legitimacy. The cases studied in this thesis were the 2005 Songhua River benzene spill, the 2008 winter storms, the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, the 2015 Tianjin warehouse explosions, and the 2016 June and July floods. The 2008 Wenchuan earthquake was the deadliest disaster in a generation and provides the most thorough example to investigate China's government disaster response capabilities. Two of these crises were industrial chemical accidents near or in major Chinese cities. The remaining two were weather disasters spread over a large area that required a far-reaching and coordinated government response across multiple provinces. Each of these sets displays a type of national disaster that China experiences regularly.

In conclusion, the investigation makes two conclusions about the government's disaster response capabilities. First, the central government is able to make extensive use of its overall authority and hierarchical structure to mobilize state resources on a massive scale. This includes the CCP's control of the People's Liberation Army and state

emergency personnel, the government's economic authority to impose immediate regulatory measures, and ability to gather and distribute physical resources. Second, the CCP seeks to avert an image crisis to maintain a veneer of performance legitimacy. Two common tactics are repressing investigative journalism and jailing critics while molding an image of a paternalistic and protecting state through compassionate moral performance. However, the necessity for this last conclusion hints at why such practices are necessary in the first place. The CCP's rush for economic growth, lack of accountability, and propensity for corruption among other things are the very factors that have allowed disasters to become crises. Extreme measures are necessitated because the system the Party has built is prone to crisis. Without fundamental change, the CCP will continue facing such crises in the foreseeable future.

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Introduction

As the PRC approaches its 68th year in power, almost as long as the 69 years the USSR lasted from 1922 to 1991, much of the discussion surrounding the PRC's political future has been focused on resilient authoritarianism and why the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) did not transition along with the "third wave" of democratization that started in the 1970s.¹ The theory of resilient authoritarianism is the idea that authoritarian regimes can learn, adapt, and become more resistant to demands for regime transition. Resilient authoritarianism encompasses the growth and professionalism of state institutions, which is evident in the context of China. The CCP holds onto power partly through performance legitimacy and partly through repression. Performance legitimacy stretches to all realms of the government's domain, including addressing crises. The analysis in this thesis looks at the government's disaster management response through this lens.

At its core, resilient authoritarianism is the presence of the ability of an authoritarian regime to stay in power despite the institutional weaknesses presumably thought inherent within such regimes – including, but not limited to, poor governance, widespread corruption, and an overuse of coercion. Yet, the CCP's authoritarian regime still stands today. Andrew Nathan describes this regime as resilient due to four factors: presence of norm bound succession politics, increase in meritocratic elite promotion, the

1. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 5.

differentiation and functional specialization of regime institutions, and the creation of methods for political participation within the regime.² These four factors are the result of an evolutionary process by which the CCP has developed both formal and informal rules to regulate cadre behavior and improve the political mechanisms with which the Party governs. For example, in regards to succession politics Deng Xiaoping passed reforms to guarantee the personal security of CCP members from harsh retribution and imposed mandatory retirements on party and government officials to allow the Party to better reflect the changing nature of the times.³ Reform over how high level Party positions would be given to CCP cadres led to an increase in stability and performance. Starting in the 1980s, cadres began being promoted based on successful experience with technical or challenging jobs.⁴ As a result, the Party gradually became filled with technocrats who had valuable experience rather than those solely in the favor of higher officials. The differentiation and functional specialization of regime institutions also played an important role and is valuable for the sake of this thesis. The Party apparatus and the state government apparatus evolved after the 1990s to take on different responsibilities and prevent inefficient duplication. Those in the Party Center took over “ideology, mobilization, and propaganda” while those in the government, in particular the State Council and those in charge of provincial governments, began focusing on more

2. Andrew J. Nathan, “Authoritarian Resilience,” *Journal of Democracy* 14, no. 1 (February 5, 2003): 6.

3. Minxin Pei, “Is China Democratizing?,” *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 1 (1998): 70.

4. Nathan, “Authoritarian Resilience,” 10.

administrative tasks such as economic policy, education, and welfare.⁵ Xinhua reports that, “The State Council is responsible for carrying out the principles and policies of the Communist Party of China as well as the regulations and laws adopted by the NPC, and dealing with such affairs as China's internal politics, diplomacy, national defense, finance, economy, culture and education.”⁶ Currently, the State Council and several of its departments are formally tasked with emergency management. For example, the Ministry of Transport oversees emergency rescue for railway accidents, the Safety Supervision Administration standardizes workplace safety measures, and the Bureau of Oceanography is in charge of researching ways to improve oil spill cleanup.⁷ In regards to disaster and crisis management, the ability of institutions to respond to crises is heavily affected by the clear definition of their responsibilities. The State Council, as a government body, is able to coordinate and delegate its departments accordingly as needed. This removes much of the responsibility and pressure from the Party apparatus. Lastly, Nathan lists the creation of political participation on the local level as a way for the CCP to adjust its governance and let Chinese citizens participate to an extent that is still manageable for the Party. Legislation such as the Administrative Litigation Act of 1989 allow citizens to air their grievances and sue government agencies.⁸ This option allows citizens to have an

5. Nathan, “Authoritarian Resilience,” 12.

6. “The State Council,” accessed April 22, 2017, http://www.gov.cn/english/2005-08/05/content_20763.htm.

7. “国务院办公厅关于印发国务院 2017 年立法工作计划的通知_政府信息公开专栏,” accessed April 18, 2017, http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2017-03/20/content_5178909.htm.”

outlet and participate within the system without sacrificing very much of the Party's authority. It is these four factors that have allowed the CCP regime to reconsolidate after the 1989 Tiananmen protests and resist democratization.

In terms of political legitimacy and resilient authoritarianism, disaster management becomes a stage in which the government's performance is on display. The response by the CCP when national disasters occur is vital towards projecting and protecting the governing regime's legitimacy. If the regime cannot handle natural disasters or industrial disasters well, then the government's image is under attack. A government that cannot protect the wellbeing of its citizens loses authority. However, the factors that have contributed to resilient authoritarianism in China have also allowed the central government to better respond to such situations of crisis, particularly the new found emphasis on meritocracy and the functionalization of state institutions. The former brings capable officials into positions of power while the latter delineates responsibilities to prevent duplication and improve their dexterity when crises occur. Each ministry, department, or agency is allowed to focus on one area and coordinated by the overarching State Council. It is this system in which China, for better or worse, has found itself.

Crisis Framework

Crises are the focal point of investigation in this thesis and are mainly defined based on three criteria: threat, urgency, and uncertainty. In essence, crises are situations

8. Nathan, "Authoritarian Resilience," 15.

in which there is serious threat to the value or norms of a system, under which time and uncertain circumstances demand immediate decision making. Arjen Boin identifies that the presence of these three factors make the situation, turning disorder into crises. The factor of threat refers to when the basic norms of a system come under attack.⁹ Threats strike at the security of basic values such as food, shelter, and safety. Threats define a political state of crisis, particularly in terms of the government and authority.

Governments are expected, at a bare minimum, to maintain its citizen's security and safeguard the national interest. Threats to these two foundational expectations are threats to the political regime. In China, the Chinese Communist Party is the regime, maintaining a monopoly over the central and local governments, the military, and foreign affairs.¹⁰ Its claims to legitimacy lie in its ability to govern a country of over 1.3 billion and maintain stability. In addition, the current CCP leadership under President Xi Jinping takes this basic responsibility even farther by desiring to carry out the "Chinese dream" of national rejuvenation and lead the country to becoming a "moderately prosperous society by 2020."¹¹ These self-made goals not only define the ideological and national political policy of the CCP's current administration, but also admit the responsibility the CCP has

9. Arjen Boin et al., *The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership under Pressure* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

10. "The Chinese Communist Party," *Council on Foreign Relations*, accessed April 20, 2017, <http://www.cfr.org/china/chinese-communist-party/p29443>.

11. "Xinhua Insight: Xi Leads Nation in Pursuing Chinese Dream in New Year - Xinhua | English.news.cn," accessed April 20, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-02/06/c_136035945.htm.

towards the Chinese people. Threats toward these goals and responsibilities strike at the legitimacy of the CCP, which is not held democratically accountable.

Urgency is an important characteristic that turns a threat into a state of crisis. Threats that are time sensitive and immediate create a perception of crisis.¹² An immediate problem demands an immediate response, which demands rapid decision making. Crises addressed too late only become worse. In such scenarios, situations and actors are always changing since time stops for no one. The presence of urgency, whether perceived or real, turns problems into crises. Its presence signifies that “the threat is here, it is real, and it must be dealt with as soon as possible.”¹³ Urgent issues can be a curveball to politicians and administrators – interrupting plans, forcing changes to policy, and at the very least demanding their immediate attention. The time crunch also effects mechanisms of decision-making, rushing the relevant authorities to make decisions they may not be completely confident with.

The third factor of uncertainty is what delineates a problem from a crisis. Familiar problems can be faced with similar responses based on past experiences or modelling. Crises have an element of uncertainty in which the next decision might not be correct or the problem may not have been identified. Uncertainty is similar to a fog of war, in the sense that the decision makers do not have complete information during crises and can act only with what is familiar or available at hand. Yet, they must act all the same. During

12. Boin et al., *The Politics of Crisis Management*, 6.

13. Ibid., 6.

times of crisis, “citizens look to their leaders.”¹⁴ Due to these three factors, crises are not simply problems that governments and their institutions must cope with. They pose a threat to the system and the leadership, and by nature are political. Crises are contests of power, legitimacy, and friction. In an authoritarian regime such as China, crises are the state of affairs in which the political system is under threat. Each crisis brings the question of legitimacy to the forefront as China’s leaders must prove that they can lead. If not, then trouble begins.

The lack of accountability within the Chinese government compounds the threats posed by crises. A large enough crisis could threaten the CCP’s hold on power, forcing the Party into a situation it does not want. The 1989 Tiananmen protests were a prime example of such a crisis, particularly in this case a political one. Due to the lack of accountability however, crises, both big and small, pose greater threats to the CCP than they would in a democratically elected regime. In a liberal democracy, a crisis has the potential to dethrone the ruling political party or leaders in power. However, there are usually other politicians or parties that can take their place. In an authoritarian regime such as China’s however, crises threaten the entire one party regime. A loss of legitimacy can have a cascading effect, leading to spillover in all areas the CCP is involved in. In a government without many real channels for citizens to voice their concerns or hold authorities accountable, citizens release their discontent through protest and loss of faith in the Party. Failures to address crises lead to a decrease in legitimacy and weaken the ability of the CCP to maintain power through performance legitimacy.

14. Boin et al., *The Politics of Crisis Management*, 3.

National disasters and emergencies have the capacity to become crises. The presence of threat, urgency, and uncertainty create situations in which the CCP must respond effectively or else it will suffer an image attack. The CCP recognizes this and has various government organs and legislation dedicated to this purpose. The State Council is in charge of domestic affairs, including emergency response. The 2007 Emergency Response Law of the People's Republic of China states, "For the purposes of this law, emergencies include natural disasters, calamitous accidents, public health accidents and public security incidents, which occur abruptly and cause or may potentially cause serious social harm and for which measures for handling emergencies need to be adopted."¹⁵ The 2006 National Comprehensive Emergency Response Plan for Sudden Public Incidents defines such situations as, "An incident that occurs suddenly and causes or has the potential to cause enormous casualties or fatalities, loss of property, and environmental or ecological damage; and to pose a severe threat to society or endanger public security."¹⁶ These incidents have the capability to turn into crises and the government accordingly has legislation and policies dedicated to addressing this. The most common emergencies China today faces are natural and industrial disasters. The presence of norm bound succession politics have so far decreased the probability of political crises and incidents in recent decades, with the notable exception of Bo Xi Lai

15. "Emergency Response Law of the People's Republic of China," *Database of Laws and Regulations*, accessed April 21, 2017.
http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/Law/2009-02/20/content_1471589.htm.

16. Catherine Welch, "Civilian Authorities and Contingency Planning in China," in the *The People's Liberation Army and Contingency Planning in China*, edited by Andrew Scobell, Arthur S. Ding, Phillip C. Saunders, and Scott W. Harold, 88, Washington, D. C.: National Defense University Press, 2015.

and the Falun Gong movement. While pundits suspect that President Xi may decide to break with tradition and stay in power beyond the informal age limit, up until now the political process has been bloodless and lacks the distinct retributive and harsh qualities once found in the Mao era.¹⁷ Instead, threats to the CCP's legitimacy come from other areas – corruption, foreign affairs, the economy, and disasters. This thesis will focus on the last category, disasters. Disasters have the potential to become crises, and in doing so pose a lasting legitimacy test for the CCP. Natural disasters, such as earthquakes, storms, and floods, are for the most part inevitable while industrial disasters have accompanied China's explosive and vastly unregulated economic growth. However, what is not inevitable is the damage and response to such situations. Even after a period of high intense growth, China continues to suffer expensive and damaging natural disasters one after another. Five out of eight of the most expensive non-U.S. weather disasters since 1980 have all occurred in China. Four were floods and one was a drought, each leading to a significant loss of life.¹⁸ As a result, natural disasters pose a potential risk to the CCP has a cause of crisis, and in certain situations they have been. While not necessarily posing an existential threat to the Party's authority, these crises can result in the form of an image crisis. A failed or faulty response to a crisis results in an attack on the CCP's

17. Chris Buckley, "Xi Jinping, Seeking to Extend Power, May Bend Retirement Rules," *The New York Times*, March 2, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/02/world/asia/xi-jinping-china-retirement-rules.html>.

18. "Earth's 5th Costliest Non-U.S. Weather Disaster on Record: China's \$22 Billion Flood | Category 6™," accessed April 7, 2017, <https://www.wunderground.com/blog/JeffMasters/comment.html?entrynum=3355>.

image, specifically its image of effective governance and preservation of stability. An image crisis thus leads to a loss of performance legitimacy. Industrial disasters are very much the same, reflective of the government's role, or lack of role, in being able to grow the economy, provide material benefits for Chinese, and commit to the protection of the public's wellbeing at the same time. Crises of an industrial disaster are not necessarily existential to the CCP's hold on political authority, but instead cast doubt on the Party's ability to be responsible towards the people. In addition, natural and industrial disasters can shed light on the role of the state in preventing the vulnerabilities associated with disaster. For example, the shoddy construction of school buildings contributed in large part to the high death toll of the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake. This vulnerability was a direct result of poor governance by local authorities and was not inevitable, though the earthquake was. The revelation of such shortcomings through such situations can prove to be a crisis. To be able to address such disasters is a major challenge for the Chinese government.

The propensity of national disasters becoming crises in China and the ensuing government response will be investigated through five cases to understand China's government disaster management response. The first case is the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, through which will be shown the ability of the central government to massively mobilize resources, respond with compassionate moral performance, and utilize civil society. The behavior of the central government in response to this earthquake crisis is illustrative of how the CCP has conducted its response since. The next four cases are put into pairings due to the similar nature of the disasters. The first pair are weather-related – the 2008 winter storms and the 2016 June and July floods.

These two natural disasters were situations in which the central government needed to conduct a multi-province response over a wide area and were longer in duration than other disasters, thus testing the ability for the central government to sustain its response. The next pair are industry-related – the 2005 Songhua River benzene spill and the 2016 Tianjin warehouse explosions. Both disasters were symptomatic of the common industrial disasters that have been occurring in China since the country began to economically reform and open up. They highlight the inherent vulnerabilities within a corrupt economic system with little accountability and regard for public safety. In addition, they represent a long term threat to the physical wellbeing of the Chinese people. The long-term response brought about due to both incidents also varied in terms of follow through and efficacy. This thesis seeks to use these five case studies to examine how the Chinese government handles disasters, how capable the government is, and how such crises relate to the legitimacy of the CCP.

2008 Wenchuan Earthquake

Introduction

May 12, 2008 began as a normal day in China. The Beijing Olympics were three months away and the Olympic torch had just crossed into mainland China a few days before. But at 2:28 PM the ground started trembling in Sichuan Province as a 7.9 magnitude earthquake shook the earth for over two minutes. The epicenter was only 80 kilometers away from Chengdu, a major city center with a population of 7.6 million.

Those affected included over 87,000 people dead or missing, 370,000 injured, and almost 5 million left homeless. The earthquake, with a fault line of 240 kilometers, could be felt as far away as Shanghai, over 1,700 kilometers away. Tremors were reported across borders in Pakistan, Vietnam, and Thailand.¹⁹ The 2008 Wenchuan earthquake was China's deadliest disaster in a generation, but proved to be a pivotal learning point for how Beijing would handle natural disasters in the 21st century.

Following Boin's crisis framework of threat, urgency, and uncertainty, the Sichuan earthquake fulfilled all three criteria. It contained a vast threat to the physical and mental health of Chinese citizens. The disaster imposed a sense of urgency on both the government and the Chinese people, and created an atmosphere of uncertainty; no one knew the level of damage that had occurred or if more tremors would follow. As a result, from the very first day the earthquake was seen by the CCP as a political crisis of performance and moral legitimacy. The system maintained by the Party was under external threat and citizens looked to the state to avert or mitigate it. The government's performance would be a legitimacy test and thus, as Boin describes, a political activity. But good performance was also a moral imperative: the lives of Chinese people were in danger and needed saving. The Chinese government responded to this dual challenge in three ways: with the mass mobilization of state resources, through compassionate moral performance, and the utilization of civil society.

19. "Sichuan 2008: A Disaster on an Immense Scale," *BBC News*, May 9, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-22398684>.

Mass Mobilization of State Resources

Drawing upon the institutional advantages of a one party authoritarian regime, the Chinese central government mobilized state and military resources almost immediately. Two hours after the earthquake occurred, State Council head and Premier Wen Jiabao flew to Sichuan to oversee the disaster response in an ad hoc committee in Dujiangyan.²⁰ Upon landing, he received a briefing and began organizing the response through the establishment of the Earthquake Disaster Relief Headquarters of the State Council. The State Council is the chief administrative authority of the People's Republic of China and includes the heads of every governmental department and agency. Since the Wenchuan Earthquake was classified as a Level 1 "very serious emergency", the Council and Premier Wen were entitled under Article 8 of The Law on Public Emergencies Response to set up an emergency response group.²¹ Under the State Council's direction, departmental institutions then also began coordinating assistance.²² Nine working teams

20. "Premier's Hands-on Approach an Inspiration," *China Daily*, May 18, 2008, https://web.archive.org/web/20080518072800/http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-05/15/content_6685854.htm.

21. Welch, "Civilian Authorities and Contingency Planning in China," in the *The People's Liberation Army and Contingency Planning in China*, 88.

22. Bin Xu, "Consensus Crisis and Civil Society: The Sichuan Earthquake Response and State-Society Relations," *The China Journal* 71 (January 1, 2014): 98, doi:10.1086/674555.

were organized respectfully by the Headquarters of the PLA General Staff, the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the China Earthquake Administration, the Ministry of Health, the Publicity Department of the CCP, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, the National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Water Resources, and the Ministry of Public Security.²³

In regards to PLA support, the Central Military Commission, China's highest military command authority, set up a disaster relief force which included personnel from the army, air force, armed police corps, public security, fire fighter, and reserve militia.²⁴ Mobilization of military personnel came from both nearby units and farther military regions. Within two hours of the earthquake, 6,100 People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops of the Chengdu Military Region had been mobilized for relief assistance. Accompanying them was a special earthquake relief team from Yunnan province, which is in southern China.²⁵ 150 members of a field engineer regiment located in the Beijing Military Region, over 1,600 kilometers away, along with search and rescue teams and

23. Anonymous, "Providing Emergency Response to Sichuan Earthquake," Text, *Asian Development Bank*, (December 31, 2008), <https://www.adb.org/projects/documents/providing-emergency-response-sichuan-earthquake-0>.

24. James Mulvenon, "The Chinese Military's Earthquake Response Leadership Team," Text, *Hoover Institution*, (June 17, 2008), <http://www.hoover.org/research/chinese-militarys-earthquake-response-leadership-team>.

25. Kamlesh K. Agnihotri, "2008 Sichuan Earthquake and Role of the Chinese Defence Forces in Disaster Relief," *Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses*, accessed November 28, 2016, 33, http://www.idsa.in/jds/6_1_2012_2008SichuanEarthquakeand_KKAgnihotri.

medical personnel from the general hospital of the People's Armed Police Force (PAPF) were flown to Chengdu. The next day, over 20,000 PLA and PAPF troops had arrived in the city, 80 kilometers away from the epicenter. Additional support came in the forms of aircraft, vehicles, and more personnel from the PLA Air Force and PLA Navy.²⁶ Troops and supplies came in by rail, air, and road. By May 14, over 100,000 PLA troops and armed police had been sent to Sichuan Province. These personnel were the first responders to reach many afflicted areas. Two days after the earthquake, 600 PLA troops were able to reach the epicenter in Wenchuan County and rescue over 1,000 survivors.²⁷ On May 19, Army helicopters were used to rescue 217 students and 14 teachers from Xingwenping village, which was about 44 kilometers away from the epicenter.²⁸ Also on the same day, one PLA division searched over 300 villages and evacuated 6,000 people.²⁹ Ultimately, over 148,000 military men, armed police, militia, and reservists would be involved in disaster rescue for the 2008 earthquake.³⁰

The nature of China's centralized government as a strict hierarchical one gave it an important command and control advantage in responding to the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake. A relief structure was established the day of to coordinate national and local

26. Ibid.

27. "Gov't Moves Quickly after Disaster," *China Daily*, accessed November 27, 2016, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-05/15/content_6688012.htm.

28. Agnihotri, "2008 Sichuan Earthquake and Role of the Chinese Defence Forces in Disaster Relief," *Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses*, 34.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid., 35.

efforts. Military orders were given to immediately start mobilizing and assigning personnel on a country-wide level to engage in relief work. Over 100,000 personnel were conducting rescue work by the second day since the earthquake. They also made up the majority of the people involved in relief efforts; repairing roads, setting up camps, cleaning up debris, and searching for survivors. Beijing brought in help from all over China, including non-military personnel. The hierarchical political structure meant that once the earthquake was made a top priority, all of the other state and party institutions could and were ordered to contribute to disaster relief. The meshing of the party, state, and security services also allowed this top-down approach to work. Around 66,000 emergency medical rescue professionals were involved in relief efforts. Of them, 30.0 percent were from the seismic area, 56.4 percent were from unaffected areas in Sichuan Province, 12.6 percent were from outside of Sichuan Province, and 0.5 percent were from international teams.³¹

The Chinese government was also instrumental in quickly mobilizing physical resources. Military personnel used military and civilian aircraft to air drop tons of supplies to inaccessible areas. Their assistance was instrumental in providing aid immediately to the stricken areas. The central government organized and dispatched relief materials such as tents, food, medicine, and fuel. Using its economic authority, Beijing also commanded big tent factories to work towards maximizing output for

31. Jun Yang et al., "Comparison of Two Large Earthquakes in China: The 2008 Sichuan Wenchuan Earthquake and the 2013 Sichuan Lushan Earthquake," *Natural Hazards* 73, no. 2 (September 1, 2014): 1132, doi:10.1007/s11069-014-1121-8.

earthquake survivors.³² Local governments partnered with communications companies to send out emergency information through text messages.³³ Government organized non-governmental organizations took much responsibility to receive supplies and donations. The central authorities also stepped in to replace and manage local government organs during the crisis, most of which not only had insufficient information and resources to deal with the disaster, but also lost much personnel to the earthquake itself. One county, Beichuan, lost 23 percent of its local officials due to the earthquake. Many were also injured.³⁴ China was able to bring in skilled and experienced personnel quickly to fill up these positions. In addition, the government matched affected county with a Chinese province to provide support for recovery projects under the partner support program.³⁵ The most heavily afflicted county, Wenchuan, was paired with the wealthy Guangdong province. The partner support program dictated that the provinces would allocate one percent of local financial revenue towards recovery assistance in their partner counties for three years. As a one party authoritarian regime, the Chinese government was able to

32. Xu, "Consensus Crisis and Civil Society," 94.

33. "Open Official Response to Disaster Welcomed," *South China Morning Post*, accessed April 22, 2017, <http://www.scmp.com/article/637479/open-official-response-disaster-welcomed>.

34. Ibid.

35. "Report on the 2008 Great Sichuan Earthquake," *International Recovery Platform*, accessed November 28, 2016, http://www.recoveryplatform.org/resources/publications/199/report_on_the_2008_great_sichuan_earthquake.

quickly and comprehensively mobilize personnel and resources on a national scale to engage in relief effort within hours of the earthquake.

Compassionate Moral Performance

Accompanying Beijing's disaster management was also a display of moral performance. Moral performance defined by Xu is "executed through a variety of impression management methods, including rituals, the public display of political figures' moral emotions such as guilt, shame and sympathy, and rhetoric and narratives of policies and governance."³⁶ In times of crisis, citizens will focus on state actions, but also on state leaders themselves.³⁷ Moral performance is the presentation that state leaders exhibit towards and perceived by the public. It frames public discourse and expectations also. The added dimension of moral performance shows that disaster management is not purely the mobilization of resources, but also the mobilization of emotions. Moral performance is used as a way of investigating a state's cultural governance, which Elizabeth Perry defines as "the deployment of symbolic resources as an instrument of political authority."³⁸ Utilization of symbolic resources can help a state enhance its

36. Bin Xu, "Moral Performance and Cultural Governance in China: The Compassionate Politics of Disasters," *The China Quarterly* 226 (June 2016): 408, doi:10.1017/S0305741016000370.

37. Boin et al., *The Politics of Crisis Management*, 3.

38. Elizabeth J. Perry, "Cultural Governance in Contemporary China: 'Re-Orienting' Party Propaganda," *Harvard-Yenching Institute Working Paper Series*, 2013, <https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/11386987>, 2.

actions through a legitimacy or moral crisis. In 2008, that is exactly what the Chinese state did. The actions of its leaders and the framing of the disaster response narrative portrayed a compassionate China, willing and determined to shoulder its moral burden of protecting its people – and maintaining legitimacy.

China's leadership had a defining role in displaying the moral performance of the state as compassionate performance. Leadership behavior took on an emotional aspect that was not seen in previous disaster responses. First, the moral performance of the leaders were tinged with emotion, particularly sorrow and paternalistic sympathy.³⁹ Beijing even allowed families with an injured child or one who had passed away to be exempt from the One Child Policy.⁴⁰ This, combined with the visits of high level political officials, contributed to a compassionate moral performance by the state. The prime actor during the response to the Sichuan earthquake was Premier Wen Jiabao. He was in Sichuan by 7 PM on May 12.⁴¹ The speed with which he traveled to the disaster area only added to his emotional visitations of the afflicted area. He visited the Chinese Medicine Hospital at Dujiangyan at 10 PM that night. Wen walked around the wreckage and anxiously asked the rescue personnel, "How many patients were in the building? How many survivors have been found? Is there hope?"⁴² At Xinjian Primary School, upon

39. Xu, "Moral Performance and Cultural Governance in China," 410.

40. Edward Cody, "Outpouring of Help Shifts Mood in China," *The Washington Post*, May 27, 2008, sec. World, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/26/AR2008052601814.html>.

41. "Premier's Hands-on Approach an Inspiration."

42. Ibid.

hearing that two students were alive, but stuck in the wreckage of a school, Wen called out in tears towards them. “I am Grandpa Wen Jiabao. You must hold on, child! You will be saved!”⁴³ His emotional pleas resonated with the Chinese people who were accustomed to the opposite composure from CCP leaders. Stories also spread about the personal management Wen displayed to direct rescue efforts. At Deyang City, once Wen learned that children and workers were stuck in the ruins of a state-owned Dongfang electric plant, he immediately ordered the China International Search and Rescue Team to assist them.⁴⁴ One pro-government newspaper wrote that Wen had tripped while visiting rescue operations, but had refused medical treatment for his bloody arm, ostensibly to not divert medical attention and supplies from others in need. Another account mentioned how Wen yelled on the phone to berate a general when he heard that PLA troops had not reached Wenchuan City, the epicenter of the earthquake. “I don’t care what you do. I just want 100,000 people saved. That is my order.” He then slammed the phone down.⁴⁵

Wen was not the only CCP leader who personally visited the devastated areas. President Hu Jintao toured Wenchuan County the Saturday after the earthquake. During one speech he gave, an aftershock occurred. Hu counselled them, “You should watch out

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Andrew Jacobs, “In Quake, Apotheosis of Premier ‘Grandpa,’” *The New York Times*, May 21, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/21/world/asia/21wen.html>.

and take good care of yourselves too.”⁴⁶ Most members of the Politburo Standing Committee, the top leadership committee of the CCP, visited the earthquake stricken areas. Zhou Yongkang, Li Keqiang, Xi Jinping, He Guoqiang, and Wu Bangguo all visited Sichuan Province at least once in the two weeks following the earthquake.⁴⁷ Their visits, but Wen’s in particular, highlighted a sympathetic and compassionate Chinese state that was taking the greatest measures to uphold its political and moral duty to ensure the safety and health of its citizens.

Secondly, the rituals conducted by Chinese political leaders also were displays of compassionate performance. In times of crisis, the regular completion of rituals are necessary to present an image of stability and optimism.⁴⁸ They demonstrate that the state is prepared to continue governing regardless of threat and particularly in the face of uncertainty. Rituals seek to transmit this perception of political stability, regardless of the true feelings of the political leadership. In response to the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, the CCP conducted several publicized rituals. The first was holding a three-day mourning period a week after the earthquake had occurred. All national flags were flown at half-staff, including those at diplomatic missions abroad. Attention was focused on the raising of the flag at Beijing’s important and symbolic Tiananmen Square, which was flown half-mast at 4:58 AM. Air raid sirens were also set off for three minutes during a moment of

46. “President Hu Renews Call to Save Lives in Remote villages,” *Xinhua Net*, accessed November 28, 2016, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-05/17/content_8195435.htm.

47. Xu, “Consensus Crisis and Civil Society,” 98.

48. Xu, “Moral Performance and Cultural Governance in China,” 413.

silence at 2:28 PM that Monday. Public recreational activities were halted during the three days, as was the Beijing Olympic torch relay. China Central Television even darkened its screens.⁴⁹ The Chinese government utilized cultural and emotionally charged resources to portray a sense of mourning for the victims and sympathy for survivors. This was a form of cultural governance combined with compassionate performance, showing that the Chinese state – if not the Chinese nation – was deeply saddened by the lives lost in the Sichuan earthquake. The national flag and Beijing Olympic torch, representations of the country and its unparalleled modernization, were displayed with reverence. For three minutes, the government, the party, and the nation mourned together. President Hu Jintao, Premier Wen Jiabao, and other Politburo members stood silently dressed in dark suits in the courtyard of Zhongnanhai, the central headquarters for the CCP and State Council. A single white paper flower dotted each of their chests, a color associated with death in China and used predominantly in funerals. This rite was particular because national mourning periods were only held for those who died for the state, usually political leaders. These distributed images of the CCP Politburo members standing silently in mourning were unusually vulnerable and humble, highlighting that the top officials of the PRC were concerned for the victims of the Wenchuan earthquake. In this case, it had the effect of binding together the Chinese people and the Chinese state through a shared motion of remembrance – the country was one. The visits of top Chinese leaders to the afflicted areas were also a series of rituals that depicted central

49. “National Mourning Gets Underway,” *Xinhua Net*, accessed April 22, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-05/20/content_8213606.htm.

CCP officials walking amongst the rubble with relief personnel and survivors thousands of miles away from their usual perch in Beijing. The spread of media and articles depicted the usually solemn leaders emotionally engaged with disaster relief. “Our premier has been working continuously at the frontline for more than two days. Sadness is written on our premier's face, but there is also courage, confidence and hope,” says Lu Ning, a reporter with the Oriental Morning News.⁵⁰ These rituals and symbolic behaviors are efforts to preserve the continuation of CCP-led order in China during a moment of crisis and uncertainty.

Thirdly, the compassionate performance displayed by state leaders also trickled down to perception of the rescue personnel engaged in relief activity. On May 12, the day the earthquake struck, China Central Television began showing footage of military troops and officials immediately responding to the disaster.⁵¹ Much of the media that went viral involved acts of compassion or were emotionally charged. They depicted the relief workers in a positive light. One popular image was that of a policewoman named Jiang Xuaojuan who breastfed a baby because her mother was too distressed to do so.⁵² In a single picture, Jiang – who was in uniform – and by extension the Chinese state that sent her, was pictured as both maternalistic and protecting. One Xinhua article depicted the PLA troops as determined workers when 87-year-old Mao Fengying persuaded Premier Wen to improve the living conditions of the soldiers with a few words, “Rescue workers

50. “Premier’s Hands-on Approach an Inspiration.”

51. “Open official response to disaster welcomed.”

52. Xu, “Moral Performance and Cultural Governance in China,” 416.

from the armed forces are really exhausted. They need better living conditions.”⁵³

Military media also helped build PLA and military popularity through various depictions of troops involved with the disaster response work. Fifty-four-year-old Cui Changun ignored orders to halt and went into shock due to dehydration while engaged in relief work. Major General Xu Yong from the Chengdu Military Region led a team that “moved by land and water, braved being overturned by huge waves or crushed by falling rocks and collapsing cliffs, taking the lead in advancing on foot to Yingxiu Township at the epicenter of the earthquake in Wenchuan County.”⁵⁴ Air Force Political Commissar General Deng Changyou was another rescue worker to be sympathized with. “Though over 60 years old, Gen. Deng ignored gravel sent tumbling down by aftershocks and bent down to shout encouragement to a 20-year-old girl named Jia Zhengjiao who was buried in the rubble: ‘Child, hang on, you will be all right!’”⁵⁵ The rescue personnel mobilized by orders from Beijing were also a display of compassionate performance. They worked tirelessly day and night, determined to rescue as many survivors as possible. A PLA statement from their first live news conference of top military officials ever, which was organized by the State Council, promised that they would take “great efforts into carrying on the fine tradition of the military in obeying the party’s instructions, serving the people,

53. “Premier Wen’s Dialogue Touches Quake-Affected people,” *Xinhua Net*, accessed November 27, 2016, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-06/07/content_8325826.htm.

54. “James Mulvenon, “The Chinese Military’s Earthquake Response Leadership Team,” Text, *Hoover Institution*, (June 17, 2008), <http://www.hoover.org/research/chinese-militarys-earthquake-response-leadership-team>.

55. Ibid.

being brave and skillful in battle, making persistent efforts, continuing the fight, being unafraid of exhaustion, stubbornly fighting with all their might, and being determined to fight this tough battle of earthquake disaster relief and definitely not fail to live up to the great expectations of the party and the people.”⁵⁶ Other statements continued to reinforce the work and moral performance that the PLA was carrying out under the guidance of the CCP and Chairman Hu. Their energy was the state’s energy. Their hard work was the product of government coordination, and their conviction was an extension of Beijing’s sympathy.

The framing of the disaster response narrative by the state was also an outlet to display compassionate performance. Many of the accounts of heroism, compassion, and sadness were formed and spread on state media. The Chinese government acted to selectively release the information it wanted to and present a compassionate performance to the public. This manufactured display is not new and was fully utilized during the aftermath of the Sichuan earthquake. Two trends during the media coverage of the disaster response illustrate the compassionate performance spread through state media. The first was a change in tone, the second a change in emphasis.

First, as documented in the compassionate performance of Premier Wen, was a change in tone. State media adopted an emotional, sympathetic, and positive tone to counteract the negative repercussions of the Sichuan disaster and pre-emptively deflect any blame for the damages caused, something which will receive consideration later. Wen not only acted in a way that could garner public sympathy, but was also displayed

56. Ibid.

by the state media to reinforce their image. Pictures of Wen, other political leaders, emergency personnel, and survivors were depicted in a profoundly emotional way. Premier Wen also appeared on live television only a few hours after the earthquake struck, shouting encouragement.⁵⁷

Many images of Wen had him embracing children, talking with survivors, or walking with rescue personnel while the background was filled with rubble or wreckage. The same pattern was evident in most other images. State media did not shy away from displaying crying mothers, trapped bodies, or working rescuers, instead they were presented that way. Previous disaster media coverage hid signs of the dead, the injured, and the other consequences of disasters, preferring to present smiling images of rescuers and optimistic politicians. Official coverage of the Sichuan earthquake was different, displaying the emotional and physical hardship the natural disaster brought to the area – to China. This presentation invoked emotion and sympathy for the politicians who were broadcast to the whole nation as deeply concerned about their people. Then there were the pictures of PLA troops and emergency rescue workers who were engaged in relief operations, digging with shovels or carrying the injured on their shoulders. Through these images, the Chinese state became both a caregiver and a protector.

Secondly, the emphasis of the state's disaster response narrative was also different from prior disaster coverage. Previously, media coverage of relief efforts for the 1976 Tangshan Earthquake and the 1998 floods centered on the efforts of the rescuers, particularly the PLA, as heroic and protecting. These narratives depicted the PLA as

57. "Open official response to disaster welcomed."

fighting against nature on behalf of the people.⁵⁸ The media coverage of the Sichuan earthquake instead touched upon governmental response, recovery efforts, victims, reconstruction and outside reactions in addition to heroism.⁵⁹ The Chinese government emphasized the products of its own leadership in response to the earthquake, but emphasized it accompanied with portrayal of the severity of the crisis. This emphasis, combined with the moral performance displayed by the leadership, constructs the identity of the Chinese government as a sympathetic state. It is not just the heroism of the rescuers that the government can highlight and praise, but also the magnitude of the coordination needed to alleviate the consequences of the earthquake and the various amounts of groups that took part in the relief efforts. Immense management was necessitated by the sheer impact of the Wenchuan earthquake itself, something that Beijing could not hide. As a result, state media began introducing articles detailing the large response the government had to such a far-reaching disaster. Particularizing the state's response then provided an opportunity to display the compassionate performance of the government, its leaders, and the rescuers.

These two trends resulted in the appearance of a narrative of solidarity. The change in tone showed the Chinese state caring about its people while the strategic emphasis on the state's response as something beyond the heroism military troops

58. Xu, "Moral Performance and Cultural Governance in China," 415.

59. Nong Qianqian, "Investigating Crisis Communication Strategies in a Government Operating System: A Case Study of Chinese Government Crisis Response to the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake," accessed November, 26, 2016, University of Georgia: The Graduate School. 27.

displayed the multifaceted nature of the emergency relief. In essence, the change in tone made the Chinese state less distant and more human. The emphasis on the various ways the government responded to the Wenchuan earthquake broke this image down even further by highlighting that it was Chinese people, whether in the form of PLA troops, volunteers, or politicians, working through the crisis together. This notion, of togetherness, initially helped to defuse talk of blame on the part of Chinese officials. In this narrative, the Chinese people had been struck with an enormous disaster and all needed to work together, and were working together, to overcome it. The partner support program that linked damaged counties with provinces was an implementation of the solidarity narrative. When Chinese in one place suffered, other Chinese throughout the country should help and support.

Compassionate performance is also integral to image restoration. William L. Benoit describes image restoration in a corporate context as discourse intended to understand and develop a response during times of image crisis. Attacks on a corporation's image has two effects: "the accused is held responsible for an action" and "that act is considered offensive".⁶⁰ The danger to corporations when such image attacks occur is whether the public thinks the corporation is responsible for the negative action. The accuracy of such responsibility is secondary to its perception. This also applies to the

60. William L. Benoit, "Image Repair Discourse and Crisis Communication," *Public Relations Review* 23, no. 2 (June 1, 1997): 178, doi:10.1016/S0363-8111(97)90023-0.

action taken, which can be thought to be offensive regardless of whether it is. Expanding Benoit's idea to the public sphere is quite straightforward. In China, the government has an image to uphold. When that image is threatened by attacks, the CCP needs to take action to restore its image. In the Wenchuan earthquake, this meant responding to the damage the earthquake wrought in Sichuan. While the government was not blamed for the earthquake, what Beijing could be held accountable for is the emergency response itself. The perception of a failed or troubled response results in an image crisis. The CCP needed to do anything it could to avoid this situation. This involves taking responsibility for a quick and efficient emergency response, but also means preventing the perception that any of the government's actions led to a greater disaster than what could be expected. The framing of the disaster response narrative by the state and the government's compassionate performance helped solve the first problem. However, it was not as useful for the second. The death of thousands of school children due to shoddy school building construction was an image crisis for the state. It was this image attack that the government could not deal with well, in part due to the utilization of civil society.

The State and Civil Society

Non-state actors, particularly private citizens, and civil society had an important role in the response to the Wenchuan disaster, particularly because of technology. Ordinary Chinese learned about the earthquake from their social networks, mobilized in massive numbers, donated large sums of money, and volunteered to help with earthquake relief. Unlike prior disasters, Chinese citizens took it on their own to support the

earthquake victims and relief efforts. Their assistance proved to be an unforeseen factor that saw the Chinese government and private citizens working together on a massive scale for a short while.

The public spirit seemed to arise almost spontaneously once news of the Wenchuan earthquake began spreading on media. Many Chinese were motivated out of sympathy for those affected after seeing images or videos of the earthquake's destruction. One example of the typical citizen volunteer was Liu Jin. Liu was a 22-year-old student in Shanghai studying law before he flew more than 2,000 kilometers to Sichuan. He described being motivated after seeing the earthquake's aftermath. USA Today quoted him saying, "[his parents] thought the government and military could handle the disaster," but he disagreed and flew to volunteer.⁶¹ Liu was not alone, private volunteers manned relief stations and provided everything from psychological counseling to electric power for cellphones.⁶² Others with medical training went to the earthquake area to give whatever medical assistance they could. Liu Qiang, a 38-year-old from Hubei province, described "seeing people crying on TV because they couldn't get medical help" as her rational for volunteering.⁶³ More volunteers drove convoys of aid to Sichuan, helped at emergency shelters, and "millions" lined up to donate blood immediately after the

61. "China Quake Inspires Citizens to Seek Bigger Role," *US Today*, accessed November 27, 2016, http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-05-24-china-quake-volunteers_N.htm.

62. You Jiang, "China Helps Itself," *The Economist*, May 22, 2008, <http://www.economist.com/node/11409357>.

63. "China quake inspires citizens to seek bigger role."

earthquake.⁶⁴ Prominent private citizens also contributed. Many athletes and celebrities donated towards earthquake relief charities. Olympic gold medalist Liu Xiang and his coach donated a total of \$71,500 to charity.⁶⁵ Official charities became overwhelmed by the amount of donations. The Sichuan Provincial Red Cross received over 2 billion yuan, but only had 17 staff members to do so.⁶⁶ Many also donated to private charities due to mistrust of the government, fears of embezzlement, and concerns over a lack of transparency. One Foundation, a charity founded by celebrity Jet Li, received over 25 million yuan the day after the earthquake struck.⁶⁷ Why though was this public effort able to take place? Most disasters until this time had been handled solely by the Chinese government. As Liu noted, it was common for Chinese to place the burden of emergency response on the Party. However, the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake allowed for such heightened state-civil relations because it was a consensus crisis.

64. "Show of Public Spirit a Good Omen for China," *China Daily*, accessed November 27, 2016, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2008-05/28/content_6717050.htm.

65. "Chinese Athletes Donate to Quake-Hit Regions," *China Daily*, accessed November 27, 2016, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-05/15/content_6688049.htm.

66. Xu, "Consensus Crisis and Civil Society," 95.

67. Erning Zhu, "Sichuan Earthquake Reflects Changing China | Asia | DW.COM | 22.04.2013," *DW.COM*, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.dw.com/en/sichuan-earthquake-reflects-changing-china/a-16762308>.

A consensus crisis is a specific situation in which there is widespread agreement on the nature of the crisis and the approach that should be taken to address it.⁶⁸ In the case of the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, this meant the general acknowledgement of the danger that the earthquake brought and the need to bring critical aid to those in need. The external threat that the earthquake represented brought everyone to the same page. The actors in this situation were the Chinese government, civil society, private citizens, and to a minor extent international and foreign aid groups. The earthquake devastation was visible and pressing enough to unite all of these groups together to achieve the same goal: assisting those in need. The Chinese central government took almost immediate action to address the crisis. Premier Wen flew to Sichuan two hours after the earthquake had struck and began coordinating a response. More than 6,000 PLA troops began moving to assist with disaster relief and by the second day there were over 100,000 personnel in the area. However, this seemed to not be enough and civil society stepped in to fill the gap. Civil society and private individuals were primarily motivated by two factors. First was endogenous, citizens saw images of devastation on the news or videos of relief efforts and were moved to help. These were volunteers such as the Liu Jin and Liu Xiang mentioned earlier. The second factor was different, provincial authorities actually appealed for private citizens to volunteer and to help. The Sichuan government communicated that they needed donations and relief services.⁶⁹ And volunteers came. The State Council eventually ordered the local Sichuan governments accommodate

68. Xu, "Consensus Crisis and Civil Society," 93.

69. Ibid., 96.

public representatives to jointly manage relief materials and donations for the earthquake relief.⁷⁰ The Council also tried to make donation efforts and the use of funds more transparent by making the names of those officials in charge of distribution public. In addition, the enthusiasm of the public was quite strong and contributed to high civil society turn out. The mood among volunteers was quite patriotic and energetic. Some volunteers delivered crates of water bottles while chanting “Go China!”⁷¹ After the designated three minutes of silence held on the Monday after the earthquake struck, many of the gathered demonstrators spontaneously raised their fists in the air and shouted, “Come on China!”⁷² These three factors had a significant contribution to the efforts of civil society to support emergency response efforts.

There were two other contextual dynamics that allowed civil society to take a larger than usual role: the unfettered access media was given initially to report on the Wenchuan quake and the desire for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to use the state of consensus crisis to their advantage. In regards to the first dynamic, the Chinese government unusually allowed domestic and foreign journalists and non-state media permission to report on the earthquake.

Social and informal media were the first to start posting images and videos of the disaster online. The first report of the earthquake was actually on Twitter, which was not

70. “Involve Public in Managing Aid, Council Orders,” *South China Morning Post*, accessed November 27, 2016, <http://www.scmp.com/article/639814/involve-public-managing-aid-council-orders>.

71. “China quake inspires citizens to seek bigger role.”

72. Jiang, “China helps itself.”

blocked in China at the time, around nine minutes after the quake occurred and ahead of the U.S. Geological Survey by three.⁷³ Videos of students and office workers in the streets also began appearing on YouTube, which was also not blocked at the time.⁷⁴ Netizens also posted updates and questions onto online message boards, such as Douban.⁷⁵ Chinese used these internet forums and social media networks such as Twitter to begin coordinating volunteering, donations, and parsing through information about people's loved ones.⁷⁶ Initially, journalists defied state orders to enter the disaster area, but the government remarkably reversed its initial prohibition. Hundreds of journalists immediately went to Sichuan following the initial news of the earthquake to deliver live coverage of the disaster response to media outlets around the country.⁷⁷

Foreign media was also allowed unfettered access in the aftermath of the earthquake, which was a stark contrast from the Tibetan riots in March that year when foreign media was completely banned from reporting from the Tibetan Autonomous Region.⁷⁸

73. Claudia Gabarain, "Twitter and the Sichuan Earthquake: Proving Its Value?," Text, *East Asia & Pacific on the Rise*, (May 13, 2008), <http://blogs.worldbank.org/eastasiapacific/twitter-and-the-sichuan-earthquake-proving-its-value>.

74. Malcolm Moore, "China Earthquake Brings out Citizen Journalists," May 12, 2008, sec. World, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/1950212/China-earthquake-brings-out-citizen-journalists.html>.

75. "China Feels the Quake Online," *BBC News*, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7402612.stm>.

76. Gabarain, "Twitter and the Sichuan Earthquake."

77. "Show of public spirit a good omen for China."

78. Xu, "Consensus Crisis and Civil Society," 100.

According to China Daily, “at least 545 overseas reporters from 144 media organizations in 30 countries” reported from Sichuan right after the earthquake.⁷⁹ In an unprecedented moment, Deputy Director of the State Council Information Office Wang Guoqing and President Hu actually thanked foreign media for risking their personal safety to report from the quake disaster zones.⁸⁰ The Chinese government had an incentive to allow foreign media access to the quake zone however. They did not want to repeat the spate of foreign media coverage that followed the Tibetan riots in March, which was particularly bad timing for the CCP who did not want bad coverage a mere five months before the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Foreign media coverage of the Tibetan riots was completely negative in part to foreign media outlets primarily relying on Tibetan exiles for information, which was biased against the PRC.⁸¹ Another benefit to the Chinese government for allowing foreign media into Sichuan province was the opportunity to use the press as good coverage. Denying the press access also meant denying the CCP any chance to latch onto positive reporting of the government’s emergency response. Instead, the positive reporting that did occur thanks to foreign media gaining access was used by the CCP to promote the narrative that the crisis was under control. For example, Premier Wen utilized this opportunity to hold an impromptu press conference with foreign

79. “Quake Zone Open to Overseas Media,” *China Daily*, accessed April 22, 2017, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2008-06/12/content_6754381.htm.

80. Cody, “Outpouring of Help Shifts Mood in China.”

81. Xu, “Consensus Crisis and Civil Society,” 100.

reporters, a very rare event for foreign media.⁸² In fact, foreign media also propagated the narrative that the Chinese government was being open to honest reporting. According to the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Associated Press, and Los Angeles Times noted the open access Beijing gave to foreign journalists.⁸³ Such access would eventually become restricted, for both domestic and foreign news, but the CCP successfully used the good coverage to build a positive image for itself.

The initially lax restrictions on the media also spilled over to policies for NGO involvement. NGOs played a more expansive role in responding to the Sichuan earthquake than they ever had in any previous situation. The position of NGOs within Chinese society before the earthquake was one of social service, rather than social advocacy.⁸⁴ Government repression and suppression of NGOs and social efforts to advocate for social, and inevitably political, ideas had forced Chinese NGOs to adapt. Those that continued on the path of social advocacy found themselves dismantled and repressed. NGOs that focused on social service were less likely to run into trouble with the authorities and thus made up the majority of NGOs in China. Their lack of political or even socio-political goals made them safe from the Chinese government. As a result,

82. "Why Grandpa Wen Has to Care," *The Economist*, June 12, 2008, <http://www.economist.com/node/11541327>.

83. "China's Earthquake Coverage More Open But Not Uncensored," *Congressional-Executive Commission on China*, accessed April 14, 2017, <https://www.cecc.gov/publications/commission-analysis/chinas-earthquake-coverage-more-open-but-not-uncensored>.

84. Xu, "Consensus Crisis and Civil Society," 96.

NGOs were ready to perform the volunteering and assistance role that the earthquake situation demanded. NGOs began responding immediately. According to data from Beijing Normal University, “73.2 per cent of the 60 NGOs that they investigated took action within 24 hours after the earthquake.”⁸⁵ Domestic NGOs also formed networks and partnerships to better respond to the crisis. According to Shawn Shieh, Chinese NGOs began organizing horizontally through different sectors on their own.⁸⁶ Chinese civil society started taking independent action because NGOs felt that now was the time they could participate and utilize their social service-oriented characteristics. There were six NGO symposiums in the first month after the earthquake that met to discuss how NGOs could assist with the disaster relief in their own way, thereby differentiating themselves from the government.⁸⁷ A reason for this emphasis may have been that NGOs wanted to prove to Beijing that not only were they able to stay out of sensitive political issues, but also that their presence was a necessity. Until the crisis subsided, government officials temporarily walked back on their hostility to NGOs and private organizations working specifically towards supporting relief efforts.⁸⁸ The serious threat of the disaster and the lack of capacity on the part of the state created this situation.

As a result, NGOs were able to funnel and expand the public spirit and the volunteer atmosphere that had swept the nation towards disaster relief. The NGO

85. Xu, “Consensus Crisis and Civil Society,” 97.

86. Shawn Shieh, “NGOs in China: The 2008 Sichuan Earthquake and China’s NGOs,” *NGOs in China*, February 24, 2010, <http://ngochina.blogspot.com/2010/02/2008-sichuan-earthquake-and-chinas-ngos.html>.

87. Xu, “Consensus Crisis and Civil Society,” 97.

88. Xu, “Consensus Crisis and Civil Society,” 104.

networks that Shieh mentions began to form with massive support and energy almost immediately. The day after the earthquake, the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation, China Foundation for Youth Development, and other NGOs jointly drafted and published a “Declaration on China’s NGOs for Earthquake Disaster Relief.”⁸⁹ Notable is the primary role of private foundations that together generated this declaration. The amount of private foundations began to rise after the Beijing passed Foundation Regulation laws detailing the roles of these specific NGOs in 2004.⁹⁰ One distinct characteristic of private foundations is their inability to raise funds publicly and are only able to do so through private channels. However, in a historic first, government-organized NGOs distributed funds for NGOs assisting with the disaster response. The Chinese Red Cross allocated 20 million RMB towards NGO projects, including Global Village, an environmental NGO that assisted with village rebuilding.⁹¹ Private foundations were also able to distribute money to NGOs. For example, the Nandu Foundation gave monetary donations to over 60 grass-roots NGOs focusing on reconstruction.⁹² The NGOs decidedly assisted with

89. Anonymous. “Providing Emergency Response to Sichuan Earthquake.” Text. *Asian Development Bank*, December 31, 2008. <https://www.adb.org/projects/documents/providing-emergency-response-sichuan-earthquake-0>. 27.

90. Shieh, “NGOs in China: The 2008 Sichuan earthquake and China's NGOs.”

91. Ibid.

92. Shawn Shieh, “NGOs in China: Xu Yongguang’s Talk at the Foreign Correspondent’s Club of China,” *NGOs in China*, March 7, 2010, <http://ngochina.blogspot.com/2010/03/xu-yongguangs-talk-at-foreign.html>.

apolitical affairs such as providing relief services, goods, and monetary donations.⁹³ Organizations also self-censored themselves during this process, mainly restricting themselves to doing social service work and no social advocacy work. One NGO told its workers not to “get involved in conflicts with the community,” and another directed its efforts specifically to opening libraries, taking care of children, and teaching people how to knit.⁹⁴ As such, NGOs were able to play a wider role in responding to the national disaster, but were limited by what kind of spaces they could take up and what services they could provide. In total, more than one million volunteers helped with relief measures, thanks in part to the efforts of NGOs.⁹⁵

However, all good things eventually come to an end. The same was true for the unfettered access the media had in Sichuan and for the level of independent action NGOs worked with. Optimistic op-eds and blog posts about the open future of civil society and media in China quickly lost steam as the Chinese government reverted to its usual censorship and restrictions on civil society. Beijing began clamping down on independent media reporting at least six weeks after the earthquake struck in May because more coverage, particularly foreign media coverage, began focusing on the shoddy construction of the multiple school buildings that collapsed.⁹⁶ Restrictions on the media,

93. “Providing Emergency Response to Sichuan Earthquake,” 26.

94. Xu, “Consensus Crisis and Civil Society,” 106.

95. “Providing Emergency Response to Sichuan Earthquake,” 27.

96. John J. Tkacik, “Seismic Suppression: Chinese Censorship After the Sichuan Earthquake,” *The Heritage Foundation*, accessed November 26, 2016,

particularly foreign media, began when news reports about protests and criticism over the school buildings started occurring. The Chinese government clamped down on both domestic and foreign media, began restricting the disaster zones, and started arresting critics in what ended up being a return to repression. But first the CCP worked to stifle protests and local critics.

Chinese citizens in Sichuan, particularly parents, started criticizing the government once they realized that the school buildings their children had attended were not built up to earthquake-proof standards. At least 6,500 children and their teachers died on May 12 in their school rooms.⁹⁷ At least 7,000 school buildings collapsed due to the earthquake.⁹⁸ Protests began less than a month after the earthquake struck and were forcibly stopped by the police. On June 3, a large group of parents went to Dujiangyan City's People's Court to file a lawsuit apparently against the headmaster of the city's Juyuan Middle School, which had killed hundreds of children after collapsing during the quake.⁹⁹ Police officers prevented them from filing the documents and stopped the proceedings. Later that day, BBC attempted to visit the court but over 100 officers

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2008/06/seismic-suppression-chinese-censorship-after-the-sichuan-earthquake>.

97. "China Tries to Shift Focus Away from School Collapses," *Reuters*, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/btscenes-quake-schools-dc-idUKPEK16279720080526>.

98. "After Fatal Lesson, China Builds Stronger School in Quake zone," *Xinhua Net*, accessed November 27, 2016, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-04/28/content_11272165.htm.

99. "China Reins in Quake School Fury," *BBC News*, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7434054.stm>.

blocked the way. This occurred all over Sichuan, with reports of parents being detained, physically hurt, or pressured by police officers and officials.¹⁰⁰ The Chinese government also began sealing off damaged and collapsed school buildings, which were often being turned into makeshift memorials for grieving parents. For examples, parents placed wreaths and banners calling for justice around the Xinjian Primary School. Police came and took both away, only to end up returning the wreaths but not the banners after widespread outcry.¹⁰¹ Parents of over 100 students who had lost their lives marched in the streets of Mianzhu City and were approached by a local official who knelt in front of them and plead for them to stop the march.¹⁰² Other government officials attempted to pressure protestors to accept monetary government settlements and compensation.¹⁰³ One banner set up in the memorial for the children who died at Fuxin No. 2 Primary School said, “While we cannot stop a natural disaster, human errors are the most hated.”¹⁰⁴ Many parents held resentment and bitterness towards the local officials and those they believed to be complicity in letting construction companies bypass earthquake-safety regulations. In face of such criticism, the Chinese government quickly shifted gears and went back to restricting media and repressing protests.

100. “China: End Quake Zone Abuses,” *Human Rights Watch*, May 6, 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/05/06/china-end-quake-zone-abuses>.

101. “China reins in quake school fury.”

102. “China tries to shift focus away from school collapses.”

103. “China: Cancel Trials of Quake Victim Advocates,” *Human Rights Watch*, August 4, 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/08/04/china-cancel-trials-quake-victim-advocates>.

104. “China tries to shift focus away from school collapses.”

The central government took notice and began instructing CCP organs, media, and security services to take control of the narrative and work towards preserving order and stability. In June, Politburo Standing Committee member and Secretary of the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission of the CCP Zhou Yongkang visited Sichuan Province and urged security forces to “maintain social stability” before the one month anniversary of the earthquake.¹⁰⁵ Government efforts to preempt criticism and perpetuate a positive, pro-government narrative took three forms: changing the media narrative, restricting foreign media, and arresting critics.

In line with Zhou’s directive, officials began restricting the national conversation. Online, forums and web discussion groups were scrubbed clean of any criticism surrounding the collapsed school buildings. Critical posts were deleted.¹⁰⁶ The CCP began directly exerting pressure to stop reporting on sensitive issues. Articles and news media that contained criticism of the school buildings disaster were themselves subject to criticism by state organs and state media. New China News Agency, a state media group, directly accused the Southern Weekend paper for using “tinted glasses to view China” after the latter published commentary linking the high death toll of students to the poor construction of school buildings.¹⁰⁷ The Ministry of Education (MOE) also began

105. Xu, “Consensus Crisis and Civil Society,” 105.

106. Tkacik, “Seismic Suppression.”

107. Mark Magnier, “China Calls Halt to Post-Quake Freedoms,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, June 6, 2008, <http://www.smh.com.au/world/china-calls-halt-to-postquake-freedoms-20080605-2m9j.html>.

pushing a “heroic teacher” narratives by highlighting the accomplishments of teachers who put their students first and brought them to safety. For example, MOE officials spent a news conference praising teachers and students for acting heroically.¹⁰⁸ The MOE then pledged to start a national study campaign to teach students around the country about the hero teachers and students. Beijing also attempted to show that justice was being served by firing officials for the magnitude of the earthquake’s destruction. One department official reported that the 43 officials had been reprimanded and at least 12 of them fired due to “dereliction of duty and misuse of earthquake relief.”¹⁰⁹ In an effort to show that the emergency response operation would not be inhibited by corruption, the State Council introduced transparency measures in regards to public donations by instructing local government officials to make sure, “the names of the people in charge of the distribution should be made known to the public as well as their contact numbers. [Local governments] should invite a number of people's representatives to help oversee and manage the distribution of relief materials.”¹¹⁰ There also seems to be some efforts by the CCP to quickly and efficiently respond to allegations of corruption. One blogger in late May reported that wealthy Sichuan residents were using their connections to misappropriate tents for their own use. In response, the government launched an

108. “China tries to shift focus away from school collapses.”

109. “China Quake Death Toll to ‘Exceed 80,000’,” *CNN*, accessed April 15, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/06/24/quake.toll/index.html>.

110. “Involve public in managing aid, council orders.”

immediate investigation.¹¹¹ All of these efforts were carried out to show that the government was being responsible in how it was responding to the earthquake. The central government also tried to preempt criticism by focusing on measures the CCP was taking to avoid such disasters in the future. For example, the Xinhua published an article a year after the earthquake struck titled, “After fatal lesson, China build stronger school in quake zone.”¹¹² It contained positive government efforts such as the passing of an amendment to the “Law on Precautions against Earthquake and Relief Disaster,” requiring that schools be built to withstand 8.0 Richter scale earthquakes. This amendment was attributed by the article to Premier Wen. The article also noted how the Red Cross Society of China “published guidebooks for students, telling them how to survive disasters,” which Xinhua said were beginning to be used starting April 2.¹¹³ The State Council also added a clause directly linked to the Wenchuan earthquake in their 2009-2010 National Human Rights Action Plan of China for the “guarantee of human rights in the reconstruction of areas hit by the devastating earthquake in Wenchuan, Sichuan Province.”¹¹⁴ In this way, the government sought to control the narrative and use domestic media to paint a positive picture.

111. Magnier, “China Tightens Media Limits Loosened in Quake.”

112. “After fatal lesson, China builds stronger school in quake zone.”

113. “After fatal lesson, China builds stronger school in quake zone.”

114. “Full Text: National Human Rights Action Plan of China (2009-2010),” *Xinhua Net*. accessed April 15, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-04/13/content_11177126.htm.

Beijing also clamped down on the access foreign media had to the earthquake disaster zones and attempted to restrict foreign media from communication with protestors. Early signs of media limits began to appear in early June, just as protests were starting to gain steam and concern the central government. On Thursday, June 12, six foreign media journalists, including one from BBC, were prevented by security officers from covering parents protesting at Dujiangyan primary school. Even though one official remarked that it was, “not censorship” it clearly was.¹¹⁵ Almost a year later, the Chinese government was still not allowing foreign journalists to cover the aftermath of the quake. According to the Foreign Correspondent’s Club of China, the government was becoming increasingly active in regards to stopping the reporting of sensitive issues and there were at least three instances where French and German reporters were hindered by security officials from covering the school building collapse scandal.¹¹⁶ A German television crew was even detained for five hours while the father they attempted to meet was hustled away by police, despite the National Human Rights Action Plan clause. These tactics were reminiscent of usual efforts by Beijing to reign in negative media coverage.

In addition, the Chinese government specifically targeted critics. At least four Chinese citizens were arrested for attempting to investigate or even compile information

115. “Tight Security a Month from Quake,” *BBC News*, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7449814.stm>.

116. “Open Sichuan Ahead of Quake Anniversary,” *Foreign Correspondents’ Club of China*, accessed April 24, 2017, <http://freshdstudio.net/clients/oldfcc/2009/04/20/open-sichuan-ahead-of-quake-anniversary/>.

related to the school building collapse scandal. They were Huang Qi, Zeng Hongling, Liu Shakun, and Tan Zuoren.¹¹⁷ Beyond harassing parents and preventing them from holding government officials accountable, the authorities also took efforts to stop those who were actively trying to gather more information about such a sensitive issue. The government was suspected of obfuscating the actual death toll of students killed and Chinese courts have not accepted any lawsuits related to the collapse of school buildings. Resistance to independent investigation has also been high. Well known critic and artist Ai Weiwei attempted to find out what the real number of students lost was, but was harassed by the authorities.¹¹⁸ His blog was shut down and over 50 of his volunteers were temporarily detained.¹¹⁹ Huang Qi is a “veteran dissident” and was arrested on June 10 on the basis of “possessing state secrets”, less than a month after the Wenchuan earthquake actually occurred.¹²⁰ He was held without charges beyond the legal limit of 37 days without access to legal counsel.¹²¹ Zeng Hongling is a retired university professor who was arrested in May 2008 on the account of “subversion,” most likely due to publishing three essays of her experiences after the earthquake.¹²² Liu Shakun was a teacher and convicted

117. “China: End Quake Zone Abuses.”

118. “China: Cancel Trials of Quake Victim Advocates.”

119. “China: Cancel Trials of Quake Victim Advocates.”

120. “China: End Quake Zone Abuses.”

121. “Human Rights Defender Huang Qi Formally Arrested,” *Chinese Human Rights Defenders*, accessed November 26, 2016, <https://www.nchrd.org/2008/07/human-rights-defender-huang-qi-formally-arrested/>.

122. “China: End Quake Zone Abuses.”

in August of “disseminating rumors and disrupting social order” when he posted images of collapsed schools online.¹²³ Tan Zuoren was also arrested in March 2009 on the account of “subversion” after he tried to create a list of the names of students who lost their lives due to the collapsed schools.¹²⁴ Each of the four arrested had very similar charges, all related together as crimes against the state. The charges seem to have been given out because the accused were a danger to the official narrative that Beijing was creating. The results of each case varied however. On November 23, 2009, Huang was sentenced to three years in prison. His appeal was denied in February 2010.¹²⁵ Zeng was most likely let go in September 2008, but not too much information is known about her.¹²⁶ Liu was sentenced to a labor camp, but was permitted to leave in September 2008 and spend the rest of his one year sentence outside of custody.¹²⁷ Tan’s case had the most attention out of the four. Over 500 friends and supporters attempted to attend Tan’s trial in Chengdu, but were prevented by about 100 police officers. They were not allowed in on the basis that they did not possess the required pass, although they were told earlier

123. “China: End Quake Zone Abuses.”

124. “China: End Quake Zone Abuses.”

125. “Jail Sentence Upheld for Activist Huang Qi,” *Chinese Human Rights Defenders*, accessed November 26, 2016, <https://www.nchrd.org/2010/02/jail-sentence-upheld-for-activist-huang-qi/>.

126. “82. ZENG HONGLING (Released),” *Independent Chinese PEN Center*, accessed April 15, 2017, <http://www.chinesepen.org/english/82-zeng-hongling>.

127. “China: End Quake Zone Abuses.”

that no such requirement was necessary.¹²⁸ One of those that attempted to support Tan was Ai Weiwei, he was intercepted before the trial occurred and was punched by police, which left him with cerebral hemorrhaging.¹²⁹ The Chengdu Intermediate Court gave a verdict in a very short hearing of less than five minutes. His wife was prevented from entering the courthouse to hear the verdict.¹³⁰ Part of the evidence supporting the charges against him included speaking to foreign journalists about the earthquake. Tan ultimately was sentenced to five years in prison and “an additional three years deprivation of political rights” due to his efforts to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square crackdown.¹³¹ Tan attempted to appeal his sentence in June 2010 but was rejected in another very short hearing – one that lasted less than 12 minutes. He was released in 2014 after his full five-year term ended.¹³² The repression of critics harmed the positive

128. Jiang Shao, “Police Bar Public from Attending Trial of Earthquake Investigator Tan Zuoren,” accessed November 26, 2016, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/blogs/countdown-china/police-bar-public-attending-trial-earthquake-investigator-tan-zuoren>.

129. “China: How Not To Respond to an Earthquake,” *Human Rights Watch*, April 14, 2010, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/04/14/china-how-not-respond-earthquake>.

130. “Activist Tan Zuoren Sentenced to Five Years in Prison for ‘Inciting Subversion,’”/ *Chinese Human Rights Defenders*, accessed November 26, 2016, <https://www.nchrd.org/2010/02/activist-tan-zuoren-sentenced-to-five-years-in-prison-for-inciting-subversion/>.

131. “Activist Tan Zuoren Sentenced to Five Years in Prison for “Inciting Subversion.””

132. “Chinese Earthquake Activist Tan Zuoren Released after Five-Year Prison Term,” *The Guardian*, March 27, 2014, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/27/chinese-activist-tan-zouren-released-five-year-prison-term>.

image the Chinese government had labored to build after the earthquake struck. However, the targeting did seem to stop mass criticism of authorities and was part of the effort to prevent the CCP from being held accountable by outside forces. Along with censorship in the media and restriction on foreign journalists, the targeting of critics over the school collapse scandal proved that the relaxed position the Chinese government took towards the media was over about a month after the May 12 earthquake.

NGOs also faced a restriction on what their activities. As mentioned earlier, NGOs preempted government action by self-censoring themselves and purposefully keeping to apolitical services. After Politburo Standing Committee member Zhou Yongkang urged local officials and the security services to maintain stability, local authorities began imposing tighter restrictions on NGOs and monitored them more closely. It was widely reported that volunteers were required to show their identification and told to register with the local governments. Those associated with religious organizations were scrutinized even more closely, some being told not to stay overnight in disaster zones.¹³³ High profile cases of private foundations, such as Jet Li's One Foundation, gaining legal status as public foundations seemed to be an opportunity for private groups to receive government recognition. However, the full benefits of such a process and position were thrown into question due to cases of provincial governments directly interfering and managing donations given to public funds. One example was the Qinghai provincial government, who took over donations collected by public funds and was seen as the "death of charity" in China.¹³⁴ Needless to say, such behavior did not sit

133. Xu, "Consensus Crisis and Civil Society," 105.

well with NGOs and private foundations. The participation of NGOs in disaster management seemed to have reached a high-water mark with the response with the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake. No later crises or disasters seem to have had any level of NGO engagement with disaster response as displayed in 2008.

The 2008 Wenchuan earthquake was the biggest natural disaster in a generation for China. With over 87,000 dead and more than 5 million left homeless, the Chinese Communist Party needed to address the disaster and prevent a crisis from becoming even worse than it already was. If the Party was not able to handle the aftermath well, then the earthquake would be a serious blow to its reputation and image. As such, the disaster response was from the very beginning a political performance. Beijing needed to coordinate over a million volunteers and personnel, connect ruined villages with the proper relief, and finance the massive reconstruction to come. In addition, an energetic public with watchful eyes clamored to help. 2008 was a pivotal moment for China and for a Party whose success was so closely linked to its performance.

Weather Disasters - Storms and Floods

Introduction:

The Chinese New Year, also known as the Spring Festival, is the largest Chinese cultural event of the year. Celebrating the turn of the traditional Chinese calendar, the Spring Festival is preceded by what is considered to be “the largest annual human

134. Xu, “Consensus Crisis and Civil Society,” 107.

migration in the world” as millions of Chinese people working or studying in the coastal regions return home for celebrations. This mass migration, named Chunyun or the Spring Festival travel season, usually takes place two weeks before the Lunar New Year and lasts for 40 days. In 2008, Lunar New Year’s Day took place on Thursday, February 7. But one month before the festival started, a series of winter storms gathered in southern and central China on January 10. By January 21, the snowstorms had spread to nine provinces, blanketing highways and disrupting power lines. The first emergency response team was sent by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) to assist with disaster relief in Huanggang, a major municipality in Hubei province and central China. The situation in Huangguang was designated as demanding a Level 4 emergency response, the highest level according to the “National Natural Disaster Emergency Response Plan.” Hubei province was designated Level 3. By January 23 however, Anhui province was designated as Level 4 and Guizhou province Level 3. The scope of the snow storms started to exceed expectations. Disaster relief was beginning to be carried out in Hunan province and the snowstorms had now impacted ten provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities. On January 28, the China Meteorological Administration (CMA) issued a red alert – the most severe – for central and eastern China, forecasting heavy snow in Hunan, Hubei, Henan, Zhejiang, Anhui, and Jiangsu province. By the time the snowstorms subsided in mid-February, more than 78 million people and 14 provinces,

autonomous regions, and municipalities had been affected. An additional 129 lost their lives in China's "worst snowy weather in more than half a century."¹³⁵

Disasters are not always limited to simply one geographic location. The 2008 winter storms and the 2016 June and July floods show that weather disasters can create the conditions in which a widespread multi-provincial response is needed. In these cases, the central government must take control of emergency response efforts lest provincial authorities struggle on their own to protect their citizens. Such weather disasters also require a great deal of proactive measures to prevent them from becoming crises. Early warning system and even informational government statements can go a long way towards preventing disasters from occurring. The 2008 winter storms exhibited what a central government-led response looks like, particularly in regards to coordination of emergency response efforts. In addition, it occurred the year of the Beijing Olympics so the government needed to make sure that it was seen as capable of protecting its own people. The 2016 June and July floods were the first large-scale disaster test for the Xi-Li administration. Floods have been an informal standard of effective and responsive governance. Both storms and floods are China's most frequent weather-related disasters, respectively in that order.¹³⁶ If the central government cannot mitigate the consequences

135. "City Tramps Cared for in China's Extreme Snowy weather," *Xinhua Net*, accessed February 12, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-02/01/content_7545762.htm.

136. "China - Disaster & Risk Profile," *PreventionWeb.net*, accessed April 9, 2017, <http://www.preventionweb.net/countries/chn/data/>.

of these weather effects, than its claim to legitimacy as a protector of the Chinese people is under question.

2008 Winter Storms

Based on the data available, the 2008 winter storms can be divided into three periods. The first encompasses the beginning of the weather crisis until January 23, when the MCA responded with statements to the national snow crisis and the “Hunan snow disaster.”¹³⁷ It was then that the scope of the potential for disaster was finally beginning to be understood. The next segment lasts until Premier Wen Jiabao arrives in Changsha to begin personally overseeing disaster relief efforts.¹³⁸ Until January 29, the State Council in Beijing was unable to send any high-level officials over to the disaster areas due to transportation problems caused by snow storms. Provincial governments and ministries tried to coordinate relief efforts by themselves. After January 29, the central government was able to project a perception of control as the crisis subsided, sending President Hu Jintao and other PSC members into relief areas. The PLA also mobilized to join relief efforts that day. This period is marked by Premier Wen’s China National Radio address

137. “民政部针对湖南雪灾紧急启动四级响应 各地积极组织开展抗灾救灾工作-中华人民共和国民政部,” *Ministry of Civil Affairs*, accessed February 13, 2017, <http://www.mca.gov.cn/article/zwgk/mzyw/200801/20080110010512.shtml>.

138. “Premier Wen Rushes to Hunan Province to Direct Disaster Relief Work,” *Xinhua Net*, accessed February 12, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-01/29/content_7516485.htm.

in Hunan, when he told the country, “We have the faith, courage and ability to overcome the severe natural disaster.”¹³⁹

The first sign of an incoming weather crisis occurred in early January. A MCA report recorded abnormal weather due to the mixing of hot and warm air across central and eastern China on January 10. Several provinces and regions, including Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Henan, Hubei, Anhui, Hunan, Guizhou, and Shaanxi experienced rain or snow storms. The nine provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities that initially were effected by heavy snow were Anhui, Henan, Hunan, Hubei, Chongqing, Sichuan, Guizhou, Shaanxi, and Xinjiang.¹⁴⁰ Xinhua reported that heavy snow had damaged crops in Anhui province, a poor and mainly agricultural province in eastern China on January 12. Snow blanketed and damaged 215,000 acres of crops.¹⁴¹ Provinces such as Shaanxi, Hubei, Anhui, and Guizhou had never seen this much rain or snow in the past 20 years. As a result, the provincial governments and even the CMA were caught off guard.¹⁴² The Chinese Ministry of Education (ME) then issued a statement on Monday, January 21 to

139. “‘We Have faith,’ Chinese Premier Tells country,” *Xinhua Net*, accessed February 12, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-02/03/content_7556270.htm.

140. “国家减灾委、民政部发布近期全国雪灾情况通报-中华人民共和国民政部,” *中华人民共和国中央人民政府*, accessed February 12, 2017, <http://www.mca.gov.cn/article/zwgk/mzyw/200801/20080110010490.shtml>.

141. Greg Baker, “Heavy Snow Blamed for 10 Deaths in China,” *Msnbc.com*, January 22, 2008, <http://www.nbcnews.com/id/22782933/ns/weather/t/heavy-snow-blamed-deaths-china/>.

142. “China ‘Not Ready’ for Snow Crisis,” *BBC News*, accessed February 12, 2017, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7226002.stm>.

allow schools to adjust their winter holiday times due to the worsening winter weather. MOE cautioned schools to prevent bus overloading and enforce safe traffic rules. Six deaths were blamed on snowstorm-related causes, including four in Hubei and Anhui province.¹⁴³

By January 23, the snow storms had affected almost 25 million people. The MCA released a report detailing the scope of the damage caused by the snow disaster. Over 150,000 people had to be relocated, mostly from Hubei and Hunan province. Twenty thousand homes collapsed and another 80,000 suffered damages. In addition, the storms affected agriculture in these provinces and around 1 million hectares of crops were damaged.¹⁴⁴ As of this point, direct economic losses attributable to the storms were 31 billion yuan.¹⁴⁵ The MCA stated that they were coordinating with the CMA and local civil affairs departments to coordinate a response. In addition, they confirmed that they had sent a working group to the Huangguang municipality disaster area in Hubei after designating the situation there a Level 4 emergency, thus requiring a national response. January 23 was only 15 days away from Lunar New Year's day, and the storms kept going. On January 24, the MCA published a statement responding and detailing emergency relief efforts in Hunan province. The storms had now affected 32 million people in 10 provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities: Anhui, Henan, Hunan,

143. "Winter Holiday Time Adjusted due to Heavy snow," *Xinhua Net*, accessed February 12, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-01/21/content_7466555.htm.

144. "国家减灾委、民政部发布近期全国雪灾情况通报-中华人民共和国民政部."

145. See Appendix.

Hubei, Chongqing, Sichuan, Guizhou, Shaanxi, Gansu, and Xinjiang. Anhui province was designated as a Level 4 emergency and Guizhou province Level 3. The hardest hit areas continued to be Hubei, Hunan, Anhui, and then Guizhou. More houses had collapsed or been damaged, more people were forced to relocate, and economic losses were now calculated to be 62 billion yuan.¹⁴⁶

The national government response to the winter storms decisively gathered momentum when Premier Wen Jiabao ordered relief measures at an emergency teleconference of senior Chinese officials on Sunday, January 27.¹⁴⁷ Wen gave energy conservation instructions to restrict national energy usage and divert power to needed areas in the storm-afflicted regions. The Premier then attempted to fly straight to Hunan province but was diverted to neighboring Hubei province due to the weather on Monday night. Also on January 28, the PLA's Department of General Staff and the General Political Department issued a joint decree mobilizing troops to participate with relief efforts in storm-afflicted areas. They described troop relief efforts as an "anti-snow battle." By Tuesday, 158,000 PLA troops and Chinese People's Armed Police and 303,000 paramilitary members were assisting with relief work.¹⁴⁸ The next morning –

146. “民政部针对湖南雪灾紧急启动四级响应 各地积极组织开展抗灾救灾工作-中华人民共和国民政部.”

147. “Premier Calls for Action against Weather chaos,” *Xinhua Net*, accessed February 12, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-01/28/content_7513361.htm.

148. “Chinese Army Goes All out to Fight against Snow Chaos,” *Xinhua Net*, accessed February 12, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-01/29/content_7521211.htm.

Tuesday, January 29 – Wen finally reached his destination of Changsha City, Hunan’s capital, by train.¹⁴⁹ This marked the third period of the winter storm crisis and the perception that the central government was now in full control of the relief situation. On that day, three events occurred that demonstrated this perception. First, the Central Politburo, chaired by President Hu Jintao, held a meeting to decide on its emergency response and released a statement to the public, describing the crisis as the “most pressing task”.¹⁵⁰ In essence, the Central Politburo outlined the response priorities: “ensure electricity supply and smooth communications and transport by every possible means.”¹⁵¹ Second, the MCA and Ministry of Finance also allocated \$13.5 million to aid four areas affected by the storm, on top of another \$17.4 million already distributed to the disaster-hit provinces Anhui, Jiangxi, Guizhou, Hunan, Hubei, and Guangxi. Echoing the guidelines set by the Central Politburo, the MCA sent out instructions to local civil affairs agencies to help those stranded outside in train stations or highways.¹⁵² Lastly, Wen’s behavior in Changsha represented to the Chinese public that the central leadership was

149. “Crash Kills 25 as Snow Cripples China,” *CNN*, accessed February 12, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/01/29/china.weather/>.

150. “CPC: Disaster Relief, ‘most Pressing Task’ for Local authorities,” *Xinhua Net*, accessed February 12, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-01/29/content_7520750.htm.

151. “China’s Politburo Meets on Extreme weather,” *Xinhua Net*, accessed February 12, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-01/29/content_7521347.htm.

152. “China Allocates Another \$13.5 Mln to Aid Snow-Hit Areas,” *Xinhua Net*, accessed February 12, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-01/29/content_7521147.htm.

concerned and actively seeking to improve their wellbeing. Wen met with local state departments to direct relief efforts. He also visited the Changsha railway station, where he apologized to the stranded passengers. “I am deeply apologetic that you are stranded in the railway station and not able to go home earlier. We are now doing our best to fix things up and you will all be home for the Spring Festival.” One more gesture of sympathy was when Wen visited the families of three electricians who had died cleaning a transmission tower the previous weekend. He apologized to them and bowed. “As I face you here today, I cannot find enough words to express my condolence. Please accept a bow from me.”¹⁵³ The state response after January 29 marked a more active and government-directed approach to the winter storms crisis, despite bad weather continuing for almost two more weeks. Local governments worked to lower or subsidize rising food prices. The central government focused on sustaining energy production and attempted to increase domestic coal shipping.¹⁵⁴ In addition, the government had to deal with thousands of travelers stranded on their way home for the Spring Festival.¹⁵⁵ The PLA also played its part, airlifting supplies and carrying out numerous relief efforts with the

153. “Premier Wen rushes to Hunan Province to direct disaster relief work.”

154. “China Launches Coal Shipment Project to Ease Power strain,” *Xinhua Net*, accessed February 12, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-02/01/content_7545713.htm.

155. Howard W. French, “Cold Chinese Grow Angry Over Lack of Preparation,” *The New York Times*, February 4, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/04/world/asia/04snow.html>.

mobilization of 300,000 troops and almost 1.1 million reservists.¹⁵⁶ The winter storms continued for roughly another two weeks to a varying extent in 21 provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities. From January 11 to February 14, the average national temperature was “minus 2 degrees Celsius (28.4 degrees Fahrenheit), 0.3 degrees below normal and a record low for the past two decades.”¹⁵⁷

The 2008 winter storms posed a great and distinct challenge for the Chinese government. Unlike most natural and manmade disasters, the 2008 winter storms took place across a large swath of southern, central, and eastern China, thereby requiring multiple provincial responses since there was no epicenter. Threat, urgency, and uncertainty are the criteria in this paper for crises and the 2008 winter storms fulfilled all three. Adding to these three factors was the timing of the winter storms, taking place right before Chunyun and the start of the Spring Festival. The transportation demands of Chunyun exacerbated the problem by placing an enormous strain on infrastructure right when the winter storms were happening. The threat of storm-caused deaths, economic breakdown, and mass social discontent weighed heavily on the minds of the Politburo. The situation needed to be handled quickly due to the desire of the more than 170 million Chinese who wanted to return home for festival celebrations, compounded by an urgent need to restore running water, electricity, and food supply to many isolated cities. It was

156. “China Warns of More Bad Weather,” *BBC News*, accessed February 12, 2017, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7223694.stm>.

157. “China Experiences Coldest Winter in Two Decades,” *China Daily*, accessed February 12, 2017, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-02/18/content_6464154.htm.

uncertain if, how, and when the Chinese government could overcome this task. But the Party did. The roads were cleared, power was restored, and food delivered.

2016 June and July Floods

In China, floods has been a persistent test of the government's ability to secure the safety of their citizens.¹⁵⁸ These common natural disasters have been so common and intertwined with Chinese history that they were even embedded within ancient Chinese folklore. Prominent sinologist Derk Bodde wrote, "Of all the mythological themes of ancient China, the earliest and by far the most pervasive is that of the flood."¹⁵⁹ More recently in the Middle Kingdom, from 1990 – 2014, floods were the second most frequent natural disaster after storms, were second in terms of mortality due to disasters, and caused the most economic issues.¹⁶⁰ Four of the most expensive non-U.S. weather disasters since 1980 were floods in China according to the International Disaster Database, each with a significant loss of life.¹⁶¹ As a result, the almost annual flooding

158. Chris Buckley, "Widespread Flooding in China Kills Over 160, Providing a Test for Leaders," *The New York Times*, July 8, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/09/world/asia/china-floods.html>.

159. Bodde, Derke. "Myths of Ancient China" in the *Mythologies of the Ancient World*, edited by Samuel Noah Kramer, New York: Anchor Books, 1961, 398.

160. "China – Disaster & Risk Profile."

161. "Earth's 5th Costliest Non-U.S. Weather Disaster on Record: China's \$22 Billion Flood | Category 6."

that China experiences poses a recurring natural disaster problem for the Chinese Communist Party. Floods have had the most impact in terms of the number of people affected and the economic damage suffered. The consequences of natural disasters have been noted by the Chinese government. In March 2016, the Ministry of Civil Affairs reported that, “Natural disasters left about 1,500 people dead or missing annually from 2011 to 2015,” affecting over 300 million lives annually – 9 million of whom have been displaced.¹⁶² Responding to these disasters is a necessity, and the Chinese people depend upon and expect the government to do so; by providing the warning, services, and assistance needed to guarantee their safety when floods do occur.

The June and July floods in 2016 were picked as a case for this thesis for several reasons: timing and magnitude. In regards to timing, it was the first large flood to occur after Xi Jinping was elected General Secretary of the CCP in 2012 and President of the PRC in 2013. The floods can be viewed as one of the first large domestic crises that the Xi-Li administration faced. Their reaction was indicative of how well they could handle disasters and utilize China’s emergency response system. The magnitude of the June and July floods, in regards to the people affected, the scale of the response, and the economic cost to recover, raised the stakes of Xi-Li’s performance. The floods affected southern, eastern, and northern China. Over the course of two months, over 32 million people in 26 provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities.¹⁶³ The dual factors of timing and magnitude also amplify each other, increasing the pressure on the Xi-Li administration

162. “Natural disasters leave 1,500 people dead, missing annually.”

163. “China Steps up Flood Rescue in Wuhan,” *BBC News*, July 7, 2016, sec. China, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-36732306>.

and the political capital at stake. In essence, handling natural disasters properly, particularly floods, is a clear sign that the government is in control. Authority over the environment is a particular historical facet of Chinese governance, the CCP's emphasis of the benefit of projects such as the Three Gorges Dam to control flooding along the Yangtze River is not an accident. In 1938, the Nationalist government did the opposite by deliberately breaching the Yellow River dikes in an effort to prevent or impede the Imperialist Japanese Army advance in Henan province.¹⁶⁴ A poor performance when flooding occurs can poison public opinion, impede political reform, and reduce the political capital available for the Xi-Li administration. In addition, the perception of disaster relief mismanagement is a danger for key actors in the state and party hierarchies. As will be seen in the case of the June and July floods, if higher authorities feel negative pressure from public opinion over disaster negligence, they are not hesitant to blame and suspend lower state government officials.¹⁶⁵ Social media plays a key factor in disseminating positive or negative information over state performance. The June and July floods display that the stakes are high whenever massive flooding occurs in China.

As a result, the 2016 June and July floods do conform to the crisis framework – of threat, urgency, and uncertainty – posited earlier in this thesis. There was a dual threat

164. Diana Lary, "Drowned Earth: The Strategic Breaching of the Yellow River Dyke, 1938," *War in History* 8, no. 2 (April 1, 2001): 191, doi:10.1177/096834450100800204.

165. "China Suspends 4 Local Officials After Deadly Floods," *NDTV.com*, accessed April 7, 2017, <http://www.ndtv.com/world-news/china-suspends-4-local-officials-after-deadly-floods-1435476>.

involved due to the flooding. First were the millions of lives at risk considering that the flooding would impact one tenth of China's total land area.¹⁶⁶ Second were the political stakes involved. Not only was this the first big flooding of the Xi-Li administration, but the floods would test how well, if at all, the government was prepared to handle natural disasters. The MCA itself admitted that over 1,500 people have lost their lives to natural disaster every year since 2011.¹⁶⁷ The 2016 floods also imbued urgency and uncertainty. Unlike past earthquakes or typhoons that China has experienced, flooding can occur intermittently and over the course of a few weeks and is not a single event crisis. In essence, floods have more staying power and cannot be cleaned up as easily, they isolate small villages and cut off transportation between cities. Authorities needed to respond to floods as soon as they appeared, and as they repeatedly appear, or else the loss of life would increase drastically. The uncertainty in this case was also twofold. First on the local level was whether authorities could accurately predict flooding and act against it. The inability to do so led to harsh consequences, as thing in Xingtai.¹⁶⁸ Second was the ability of the Xi-Li administration to perform well and handle the widespread flooding.

166. "China Braces for More Floods as Torrential Rains Lash Central and Southern Areas," *South China Morning Post*, June 14, 2016, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/1975063/china-braces-more-floods-torrential-rains-lash-central-and>.

167. "Natural disasters leave 1,500 people dead, missing annually."

168. "China Flooding Leaves Scores Dead and Missing," *CBS News*, accessed April 7, 2017, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/china-flooding-leaves-scores-dead-and-missing/>.

Unlike other case studies examined in this thesis, the 2016 June and July floods were a prolonged weather disaster that contained crises. Unlike the 2008 winter storms, there is not a distinct turning point when the trajectory of the crisis clearly shifted. Rather, the changing tempo of the rain that caused the flooding led to a dynamic timeline of provincial efforts and central government attention. The amount of articles on state media regarding the 2016 June and July floods is rather incomplete. This is may be partially due to the extensive length and sporadic nature of the flooding crisis. Most state media articles regarding the floods were published in July.

The first signs of a rainy summer began when the State Flood Control and Drought Relief Headquarters (SFCDRHQ) reported that China was entering its flood season 11 days earlier than usual on March 21.¹⁶⁹ Two months later, the National Meteorological Center (NMC) issued a blue alert for heavy rain in Southern China on May 21.¹⁷⁰ A blue alert is the lowest level in the NMC's four-tier warning system. By May 25, heavy rain during the week forced more than 27,000 people to evacuate in central China's Hunan province, and more than 1,800 houses were destroyed by storms. The SFCDRHQ warned that the Yangtze, Songhuajiang, Huaihe, and Pearl rivers were in danger of overflowing and causing major flooding.¹⁷¹ The Yangtze River basin contains one third of China's total population, many of the regions and people affected by the June

169. "China Enters Flood Season Monday," *Xinhua Net*, accessed April 8, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-03/21/c_135209961.htm.

170. "China Issues Blue Alert for Heavy Rain," *Xinhua Net*, accessed April 8, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-05/21/c_135376671.htm.

171. "Floods Displace Thousands in Central China," *Xinhua Net*, accessed April 7, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-05/25/c_135386984.htm.

and July floods lived in this area.¹⁷² Four days later, rain triggered a landslide in eastern China's Zhejiang province as the China Meteorological Authority (CMA) continued to warn of continuing rain.¹⁷³ In early June, the central government launched the first flood control emergency response of the year after acknowledging that heavy rain was expected in Guizhou, Hunan, Jiangxi, Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangdong provinces and the Guangxi region – or roughly one tenth of China's total area.¹⁷⁴ Most of this 1 million square kilometer area was in central and southern China. About half of the region was expected to receive “super torrential rains” that increase the risk of flooding, resulting in a blue alert status. According to state media, blue alerts “involves 24-hour alerts, daily damage reports and dispatching money and relief materials within 48 hours.”¹⁷⁵ A state media article on June 20 began listing statistics related to the torrential flooding. There had been 22 deaths, 197,000 displaced, and about 3.7 million people affected by the flooding, particularly in Hubei, Sichuan, and Chongqing.¹⁷⁶ The amount of economic damage was

172. “流域行政—长江水利网,” *Changjiang Water Resources Commission of the Ministry of Water Resources*, accessed April 10, 2017, <http://www.cjw.gov.cn/zjzx/cjyl/lyxz/>.

173. “Rain-Triggered Landslide Leaves Six Missing in East China,” *Xinhua Net*, accessed April 8, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-05/29/c_135396300.htm.

174. “China braces for more floods as torrential rains lash central and southern areas.”

175. “China braces for more floods as torrential rains lash central and southern areas.”

176. “Floods in S China Kill 22, Displaces Nearly 200,000,” *Xinhua Net*, accessed April 7, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-06/20/c_135451436.htm.

placed at roughly \$400 million. Four days later, the central government began sending high ranking government officials, including State Councilor Yang Jing, to the afflicted areas. State Councilor Yang is the Secretary General of the State Council and subordinate to Premier Li but above the level of state department Ministers.¹⁷⁷ The duties of the State Council include emergency response.¹⁷⁸ State Councilor Yang visited Jiangsu province, where 98 people had died and 850 had been injured due to the weather conditions, which included hail, tornadoes, and torrential rain.¹⁷⁹

By late June, the worsening weather conditions impacted transportation and travel services in several southern provinces and Chongqing municipality. Sichuan, Guizhou, Hubei, Hunan, Jiangxi, Jiangsu, and Anhui were hit by storms for days. Train services, the backbone of China's cross-provincial transportation system, were disrupted. Highways were flooded and thousands had to evacuate their homes. The Hubei provincial government issued flood alarms due to the potential flooding danger of more than 780 full reservoirs.¹⁸⁰ On June 30, the NMC stated that the situation in southern China now warranted a yellow alert, the second-lowest level in the NMC's four-tier system.¹⁸¹ The

177. "State Council Organization Chart," *Gov.cn*, accessed April 10, 2017, http://english.gov.cn/state_council/2014/09/03/content_281474985533579.htm.

178. "国务院办公厅关于印发铁道部主要职责内设机构和人员编制规定的通知_政府信息公开专栏," *中华人民共和国中央人民政府*, accessed April 10, 2017, http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2016-06/14/content_5082034.htm.

179. "State Councilor Leaves for Weather-Battered Region to Guide Rescue Work," *Xinhua Net*, accessed April 8, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-06/24/c_135463630.htm.

180. "Rain Continues across Southern China," *Xinhua Net*, accessed April 8, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-06/28/c_135473431.htm.

next day, the NMC moved the alert level to orange, the second-highest warning level, due to a forecast of heavy storms in Anhui, Jiangsu, Hunan, and Guizhou provinces. The Tibet Autonomous Region also suffered heavy rains. Since June 27, an additional 14 people had died, 20 were missing, 120,000 had been displaced, 3,600 homes had collapsed, and the direct economic cost was over \$470 million.¹⁸²

Besides flooding, the heavy rain impacted environmental conditions in other ways. The rain contributed to landslides, such as one in Guizhou province that caused 23 deaths in Dafang County.¹⁸³ Torrential rains also burst levees and led the overflowing of river banks. In addition, floods affected rail lines and bridges, including 27 flooded railway sections and a collapsed expressway in Hunan Province. Many travelers were stranded on their way to destinations or were unable to move between major cities. Transportation from China's larger cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Xi'an, Urumqi, Kunming, and Guangzhou, to the southern provinces was halted.¹⁸⁴ Another effect was groundwater contamination, one gas station in Yiyang City leaked 3 tons of gasoline and diesel oil.¹⁸⁵ The damage to the agriculture was also immersive. Many of these poorer

181. "Heavy Rain to Continue in Parts of China," *Xinhua Net*, accessed April 8, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-06/30/c_135478352.htm.

182. "14 Dead amid Heavy Rain in S China," *Xinhua Net*, accessed April 8, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-07/01/c_135482192.htm.

183. "23 Killed, 7 Injured in Guizhou Landslide," *CCTV.com*, accessed April 7, 2017, <http://english.cctv.com/2016/07/03/VIDEbe4YnCft7RUqVxAgKBfo160703.shtml>.

184. "Rain continues across southern China."

185. "Torrential Rains Suspend Train Operations in China," *Xinhua Net*, accessed April 8, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-07/04/c_135487840.htm.

provinces contain heavy concentrations of the agriculture industry. In Anhui Province alone, the heaving flooding “killed some 7,100 hogs, 215 bulls, and 5.14 million fowl.”¹⁸⁶ Almost 1.7 million hectares of crops were destroyed.¹⁸⁷

The central government began taking a more visible approach in their response to the widespread flooding. On July 5 and 6, Premier Li went on a 30-hour tour of Anhui, Hunan, and Hubei provinces to visit local authorities, support relief efforts, and encourage the populace.¹⁸⁸ Premier Li said that the country should “prepare for an arduous campaign” and heartened Chinese to be prepared for more flooding in the weeks ahead. He was accompanied by Vice Premier Wang Yang and the previously mentioned State Councilor Yang Jing.¹⁸⁹ Since June 30, 128 people had died and 42 were unaccounted for.¹⁹⁰ Super Typhoon Nepartak started making landfall in early July also, compounding the flooding problems from a very rainy season. Several rainfall records were made, Wuhan’s meteorological office reported that more rain had fallen in the past

186. “Floods in China Kill Almost 130, Wipe out Crops,” *Reuters*, July 7, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-floods-idUSKCN0ZL0LG>.

187. Chris Buckley. “Widespread Flooding in China Kills Over 160, Providing a Test for Leaders,” *The New York Times*, July 8, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/09/world/asia/china-floods.html>.

188. “China flooding leaves scores dead and missing.”

189. “Premier Li Keqiang Emphasizes Protecting People’s Lives, Ensuring Safety of Key Embankments and Facilities,” *Xinhua Net*, accessed April 7, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-07/07/c_135493739.htm.

190. “China Should Brace for More Floods: Premier,” *Xinhua Net*, accessed April 8, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-07/06/c_135493645.htm.

week than any seven-day period since 1991.¹⁹¹ President Xi also called on the PLA and PAP to increase relief efforts.¹⁹² The number of PLA troops used for the emergency response is not completely known, but over 32,000 PAP were working to fight the flooding by July 9. Their responsibilities included evacuating people, reinforcing flood barriers, and transporting supplies.¹⁹³ On July 6, state news media reported over 186 people had lost their lives and the floods had affected 26 provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions.¹⁹⁴ However, eight days later on July 14, SFCDRHQ stated that 237 people had died with another 93 missing. The statistics were very grim for the June and July floods by this time, almost two months since the floods began. In addition to the victims of the flooding, more than 147,000 houses were destroyed and 5.46 million hectares of crops flooded. Fortunately, the water levels of the Yangtze River, where much of the flooding had occurred, finally began dropping during around this time according to the SFCDRHQ.¹⁹⁵ Flooding also occurred in northern China around Beijing Municipality and Hebei Province during the latter half of July, where the CMA issued an orange

191. "Super Typhoon Nepartak Threatens Further Flood Misery in Mainland China," *South China Morning Post*, July 6, 2016, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/1986124/super-typhoon-nepartak-threatens-further-flood-misery-mainland>.

192. "China flooding leaves scores dead and missing."

193. "32,300 Armed Police in Flood Relief," *Xinhua Net*, accessed April 7, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-07/09/c_135500706.htm.

194. "Super typhoon Nepartak threatens further flood misery in mainland China."

195. "China on High Alert as Floods Kill 237," *Xinhua Net*, accessed April 7, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-07/14/c_135513625.htm.

alert.¹⁹⁶ One county in Shijiazhuang, the capital of Hebei Province, received more rain in 48 hours than it did the entire previous year. Around 25 people unfortunately lost their lives in this last round of flooding.¹⁹⁷

The 2016 June and July floods were a protracted crisis that proved to be difficult for the Chinese government to handle. The scope of the heavy rains impacted a vast geographic area of China's territory and affected the lives of millions of Chinese. Multiple provinces received multiple bad weather conditions several times. The floods were also China's second costliest weather-related disaster in history and Earth's fifth most expensive non-U.S. weather-related disaster ever recorded according to the International Disaster database with a cost of \$22 billion.¹⁹⁸ As with other disasters, the Chinese people looked towards the government for assistance. The protracted length of the floods meant that the emergency response could not be finished quickly or at once. Unlike debris or snow, water is cannot be cleaned up and is only so malleable. The nature of flood relief necessitates a different and long-term approach. For the Xi-Li administration, the June and July floods were a testing ground for the inevitable disasters to come.

196. "Xinhua Insight: China Strives to Battle Severe Floods, Challenges Remain," *Xinhua Net*, accessed April 7, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-07/26/c_135542090.htm.

197. Michael Forsythe and Zhao Kiki. "Flooding in Northern China Kills Scores," *The New York Times*, July 23, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/24/world/asia/china-flooding-rains-hebei.html>.

198. "Earth's 5th Costliest Non-U.S. Weather Disaster on Record: China's \$22 Billion Flood | Category 6."

Storms and floods test the ability of the central government to coordinate provincial bodies on a national level. Such widespread disasters affect millions when they occur, costing the country billions in economic damage. While nature cannot be changed, at least not yet, what can be is the government's ability to limit the potential damage inflicted. Both the 2008 winter storms and the 2016 floods proved the need for an immediate, coherent, and present response.

Industrial Disasters – Chemical Accidents

Introduction

On the quiet night of August 12 at 11:20 PM, two explosions erupted in the port city of Tianjin. Flames and smoke quickly filled the night sky, illuminating the city.¹⁹⁹ Resident caught the first explosion on video on their smartphones, wondering what had happened. But the second explosion that followed seconds later was even more frightening, beginning with a bright burst of light that completely enveloped the first explosion. The successive blasts caused fires, broke glass panes, and covered the surrounding area with ash and debris. According to the China Earthquake Administration, the first explosion was recorded as a 2.3 on the Richter scale and produced shockwaves equal to three tons of TNT going off. The later explosion registered a 2.9 on the Richter

199. "Timeline of Tianjin Warehouse Blasts," *Shanghai Daily*, August 13, 2015, <http://www.shanghaidaily.com/nation/Timeline-of-Tianjin-warehouse-blasts/shdaily.shtml>.

scale and was equal to the detonation of 21 tons of TNT.²⁰⁰ Residents of Tianjin felt as if an earthquake had struck or a nuclear weapon had gone off. One remarked that, “The impact alone woke me and my sister up last night, we were so scared. We hid under our blankets and were wondering if it was an earthquake or atomic bomb.”²⁰¹ The second detonation was felt over 160 kilometers away by US Geological Survey equipment in Beijing.²⁰² A Japanese Meteorological Agency satellite was even able to capture the explosion on camera from space.²⁰³ By midnight firefighters rushed to the scene, desperately trying to contain the blazes and toxic fumes from spreading from the port to the other parts of the city. The official investigation of the blasts later found that a dry container of nitrocellulose, a highly flammable compound, had ignited in one of Tianjin’s numerous chemical warehouses.

This chapter focuses on industrial disasters, another set of crises that the Chinese government worries about, despite the regulations set in place to prevent them from

200. “China Explosions: Tianjin Blasts ‘on Seismic Scale,’” *BBC News*, August 13, 2015, sec. China. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-33901206>.

201. Ibid.

202. Amanda Holpuch. “China’s Tianjin Blast Sets off Earthquake-Recording Instruments 100 Miles Away,” *The Guardian*, August 12, 2015, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/12/china-explosion-earthquake-recording-instruments-beijing>.

203. Mark Tran. “Tianjin Explosions so Huge They Were Visible from Space,” *The Guardian*, August 13, 2015, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/13/tianjin-explosions-visible-from-space-china>.

happening. They occur regularly, though the damage extends to varying degrees. In the one year time period after the 2015 Tianjin warehouse explosions, there were at least ten other chemical-related industrial disasters in China that led to 12 people losing their lives and over 40 injured.²⁰⁴ The spate of industrial disasters in the last few decades are one of the side effects of China's expansive economic growth. As the country's chemical industry continues to grow towards a predicted 40 percent share of the global chemicals market, particularly as it shifts towards producing more specialty chemicals, the danger of industrial disasters also increases.²⁰⁵ The expanding Chinese middle class will also take a greater interest in health and environmental concerns, two fears that have only been compounded by the industrial disasters that have happened and continue to happen.²⁰⁶

The pair of cases that will be investigated are the 2005 Songhua River benzene spill and the 2015 Tianjin warehouse explosions. Both were high profile cases that highlighted the ever present threat of industrial disasters and the potential for them to become crises. Particularly in the benzene spill case, what could have been a common

204. Jing Li, "Has China Failed to Learn the Lessons of Deadly Tianjin Explosions?" *South China Morning Post*, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/2002987/has-china-failed-learn-lessons-deadly-tianjin-explosions>.

205. "Market Outlook: Thriving in China's Competitive Chemical Market," *ICIS*, accessed April 12, 2017, <https://www.icis.com/resources/news/2016/05/26/10002360/market-outlook-thriving-in-china-s-competitive-chemical-market/>.

206. Minxin Pei, "China's Middle Class Is About to Demand Big Changes," *Fortune*, accessed April 15, 2017, <http://fortune.com/2016/05/26/china-middle-class-changes/>.

industrial chemical leak instead led a city of 4 million people into a panic and heavily increased distrust in the government. These two case studies show how the important factor of local government politics and corruption can tip disasters over the brink into much more costly crises.

2005 Songhua River Benzene Spill

Benzene is a colorless chemical used as a solvent and cleaning agent. Exposure to benzene causes degeneration of bone marrow, leukemia, and a loss of white blood cells.²⁰⁷ On November 13, 2005, roughly 100 tons of this hazardous chemical leaked into the Songhua River after explosions at a petrochemical plant owned by China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC).²⁰⁸ Eleven days later, the 100 tons had become an 80-kilometer long slick of benzene and reached Harbin's water supply and urban river areas on November 24.²⁰⁹ Harbin, a city of 4 million, partially depends on the Songhua River for its running water. The Chinese authorities did not publicly release information about the vast slick of toxic chemicals until the day before, November 23.²¹⁰ It was estimated

207. "Toxic Leak Threat to Chinese City," *BBC News*, accessed April 15, 2017, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4462760.stm>.

208. "Criminal Charges Possible in Chinese Firm's Toxic Spill," *The Denver Post*, November 24, 2005, <http://www.denverpost.com/2005/11/24/criminal-charges-possible-in-chinese-firms-toxic-spill/>.

209. "China Warns Russia of Toxic Slick," *CNN*, accessed April 15, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/asiapcf/11/24/china.city/>.

that the benzene would reach the Sino-Russian border in two weeks.²¹¹ Industrial chemical accidents similar to the benzene spill in the Songhua River are common in China. Another explosion on November 23 at the Yingte Chemical Company prompted fears of another benzene spill around Chongqing and led to 6,000 people being evacuated.²¹² Schools were closed and residents told not drink nearby river water.²¹³ The 2005 Songhua River benzene spill is notable due to the time lag between the explosion at the CNPC plant and when authorities finally notified the public about the risk of water contamination. This gap received much criticism from the public and state media, which also blamed the CNPC for the accident. The river spill taught the CCP how not to respond to such a time sensitive disaster.

The 2005 Songhua Rive benzene spill fulfills the three conditions of crises. The threat of the chemical spillage was clear to the authorities, who tried to cover it up and prevent the benzene from concentrating within the Songhua River, which they failed to do. A comprehensive response was needed since the benzene quickly began moving downriver towards Harbin, one of northern China's biggest cities, and eventually towards

210. "Harbin: Truth Emerges after Secrecy," *BBC News*, accessed April 15, 2017, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4464030.stm>.

211. "China warns Russia of toxic slick."

212. Joe McDonald. "China Dispatches Inspectors to Scene of Huge Toxic Spill," *The Seattle Times*, November 25, 2005, <http://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/china-dispatches-inspectors-to-scene-of-huge-toxic-spill/>.

213. "100 Tonnes of Pollutants Spilled into Chinese River," *The Guardian*, November 25, 2005, sec. World news. <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2005/nov/25/china.internationalnews>.

the border with Russia. Over 4 million citizens were at risk from the benzene and at risk of dehydration if replacement water was not found. Uncertainty was also a factor, considering the withholding of the magnitude of the explosions from the general public and from the various authorities. The initial response by the Harbin government hid information and the danger of the spill from the public and contributed to panic within the city.

Explosions rippled through Jilin Province in northeastern China from 1:45 to 3 PM on Sunday, November 13.²¹⁴ The chemical plant was operated by the Jilin Petroleum and Chemical Company, which was owned by the CNPC. The blast shockwaves broke glass windows up to 200 meters away. Over 10,000 nearby residents were forced to evacuate to officials due to “fear of further explosions and pollution by chemical matters, which produces benzene.”²¹⁵ State media did not mention any possibility of benzene leaking into the Songhua River on November 13. The explosions, which were caused by improper handling procedures at one of the towers that held benzene, also led to some fires which were put out by 4 AM Monday. Authorities reported that almost 70 people were injured, but that no toxic gas had polluted the air quality. A general branch manager of CNPC stated to the press, “We will take lessons from this accident to improve safety facilities in production.”²¹⁶ Two high ranking officials of Jilin Province visited the

214. “At Least 30 Wounded in Chemical Plant Blasts in Jilin,” *China Daily*, accessed April 15, 2017, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-11/13/content_494208.htm.

215. “At least 30 wounded in chemical plant blasts in Jilin.”

disaster site to coordinate the response the day after the explosions – Jilin Provincial Committee Party Chief Wang Yukun and Jilin Governor Wang Ming.²¹⁷ Classes at the Jilin Chemical Industrial College and one other nearby college resumed Monday after students and faculty were evacuated due to the blasts.²¹⁸ State media reported the cause of the accident, but still made no mention of the slick of benzene heading down the Songhua River. The public was in the dark about the lethal danger posed from drinking river water.

The State Environment Protection Administration (SEPA), a national level agency, confirmed Wednesday, November 23 that dangerous amounts of benzene and nitrobenzene had contaminated the Songhua River.²¹⁹ The hazardous 80 kilometer slick of benzene reached Harbin's water supplies the next morning. The media blackout about the true nature of the chemical plant explosions prior to the SEPAs confirmation added to the panic and misinformation. The CNPC plant was located in Jilin Province, but the Songhua River traverses through Heilongjiang Province, where Harbin is located. Originally, Jilin provincial officials kept the spill to themselves, telling those in

216. "Death Toll Rises to 5 in Chemical Plant Blasts," *China Daily*, accessed April 15, 2017, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-11/14/content_494543.htm.

217. "One Dead, 5 Missing in Chemical Plant Blasts," *China Daily*, accessed April 15, 2017, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-11/14/content_494329.htm.

218. "Cause of Jilin Chemical Plant Blasts Found," *China Daily*, accessed April 15, 2017, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-11/15/content_494601.htm.

219. "Chemical Plant Blast Contaminates River," *China Daily*, accessed April 16, 2017, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-11/24/content_497472.htm.

Heilongjiang that there had been no leak. However, it seems that because the Jilin provincial officials could not contain the hazardous slick, even attempting to dilute the concentrated benzene with reservoir water, they notified the Heilongjiang authorities on November 19.²²⁰ Pressed for time, on November 21, the Harbin government announced that they would shut off and conduct maintenance work on the city's water supply system.²²¹ This surprise announcement raised considerable suspicion and fear in Harbin and within the media. A rumor started spreading that the government feared an earthquake or that there was an industrial spill. The earthquake rumor was thoroughly denied by the Harbin government, but because of the level of hysteria the authorities admitted that a chemical spill had occurred.²²² The public was very mistrustful of and angry at the government, resulting in Harbin officials releasing hourly updates after admitting that a benzene spill had occurred.²²³ Ironically, the panic that government officials wanted to avoid still happened because the authorities did not give the public enough time to prepare for the incoming slick of hazardous chemicals and instead allowed misleading and panic-inducing rumors to circulate.

The SEPA then held a press conference in Beijing, led by deputy director Zhang Lijun, to release more statistical information and laid the blame for the industrial disaster

220. Jim Yardley, "China Tried to Keep Benzene Spill Secret," *The New York Times*, November 25, 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/25/world/asia/china-tried-to-keep-benzene-spill-secret.html>.

221. Ibid.

222. Ibid.

223. "China warns Russia of toxic slick."

solely on the CNPC.²²⁴ Once the truth was out, the populace realized that the government was going to shut down the water supply to preempt hazardous contamination rather than because of maintenance led to panic. The Harbin populace began to buy as much fresh water or purchase transportation to leave the city. Supermarkets and other stores quickly ran out of water while residents also bought containers to store fresh water while they could. Water prices also went up drastically to take advantage of the panic buying. One resident quoted by BBC describes how, “The city was full of ridiculously large queues. People were buying water in massive quantities.”²²⁵ The Harbin government then finally shut off the city’s water supply for almost five days and made efforts to calm the populace. Public officials claimed to have transported over 16,000 tons of bottled water into the city from neighboring areas, including 10 trains of water containers from Shenyang.²²⁶ The Harbin government also allowed the city a brief moment to connect to the city’s water supply for 15 hours.²²⁷ In addition, authorities sought to build more wells to bring drinkable groundwater into the city and make sure that the existing wells were working.²²⁸ Harbin had 918 wells at the time of the crisis, with the government building

224. David Lague, “China Blames Oil Firm for Chemical Spill,” *The New York Times*, November 25, 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/25/world/asia/china-blames-oil-firm-for-chemical-spill.html>.

225. “Toxic leak threat to Chinese city.”

226. “Toxic Water of Polluted River Reaches Harbin,” *China Daily*, accessed April 15, 2017, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-11/24/content_497399.htm.

227. Ibid.

228. “China warns Russia of toxic slick.”

another 100.²²⁹ All of Harbin's schools were closed and hospitals were put on standby for potential benzene contamination cases, but there ended up being no fatalities of river contamination in the city.²³⁰ As with other natural disasters, the government also set up funds to assist the emergency response. Over \$1 million was put aside for general relief efforts and another \$120,000 given to the elderly and poor.²³¹ The Harbin government tried to placate and calm the populace, which did seem to have some positive affect on the population.

The danger did not end at Harbin however, despite the benzene concentration naturally diluting as it flowed downriver. The Songhua River cuts through half of Heilongjiang Province before merging into the Heilongjiang River on the northeastern Sino-Russian border. According to state officials, most of the cities and towns downriver from Harbin relied on groundwater for 90 percent of their fresh water.²³² The benzene slick finally entered Russian waters on December 16.²³³ Communication over the benzene chemical spill with Russia was initially dogged with miscommunication, with the Russian authorities at one point saying they had not been informed properly or quickly in time. Officials were reported saying that China had, "dragged its feet in

229. "Toxic water of polluted river reaches Harbin."

230. "China warns Russia of toxic slick."

231. "Toxic water of polluted river reaches Harbin."

232. Ibid.

233. "Toxic Leak Reaches Russian River," *BBC News*, accessed April 15, 2017, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4534542.stm>.

communicating about the potential health hazard.”²³⁴ However, Beijing promised to work closely with Moscow and its counterpart emergency agencies. China sent Russia eight pieces of water testing equipment and more than 1,150 tons of activated carbon to help manage the chemical hazard.²³⁵

The disaster also had political ramifications. The State Council assigned Li Yizhong, director of the National Bureau of Production Safety Supervision Administration, to head an investigation of the benzene spill in December 2005. He vowed that, “Anyone, who were found guilty of dereliction of duty, will be harshly dealt with.”²³⁶ Premier Wen Jiabao also sent out a statement ordering the relevant environmental departments to improve on water monitoring systems and water supply security. The State Council then pledged to drastically improve environmental policy and regulations to fight against environmental degradation by 2020.²³⁷ Chinese authorities had cracked down on over 2,600 polluting plants from May 2004 to September 2005, but pledged to continue to do so.²³⁸ Ultimately, the local manager of the CNPC Jilin plant

234. “China warns Russia of toxic slick.”

235. “2nd Batch of Water Purifying Materials Offered to Russia,” *China Daily*, December 16, 2005, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2005-12/16/content_3932826.htm

236. “China Vows To ‘sternly’ punish Those Responsible for Rive Pollution,” *Xinhua Net*, accessed April 16, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2005-12/06/content_3886064.htm.

237. “China Pledges to Minimize Impact of River Pollution on Russia,” *Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Australia*, accessed April 15, 2017, <http://au.china-embassy.org/eng/xw/t223245.htm>.

238. Ibid.

and head of the SEPA resigned after the crisis passed.²³⁹ The vice mayor of Jilin committed suicide days before a hearing on the benzene disaster in 2006.²⁴⁰ The Chinese government did take some decisive actions afterwards as well. Over \$600 million was earmarked towards improving Harbin's water supply and quality. Beijing also added the Songhua River to a list of bodies of water requiring extra environmental protection.²⁴¹ The organization of the SEPA was also eventually changed, being reorganized into the Ministry of Environmental Protection, thus giving the reformed SEPA greater power as a central government ministry, rather than just an agency.²⁴²

Industrial related disasters still happened, though rarely on such a large scale as the 2005 Songhua River benzene spill. However, the extent to which this disaster posed to be a crisis could have been avoided. The behaviors of local officials to hide the benzene threat contributed the most to the panic and the perception that the government was not in control. If word had been given out soon, local and central authorities would have had more time to ship water to Harbin, dig more wells, and protect the communities that were located between the site of the chemical plant explosion and Harbin. In their

239. Lisa A. Kirschner, and Edward B. Grandy, "The Songhua River Spill: China's Pollution Crisis," *Parsons, Behle & Latimer*, accessed April 15, 2017, <http://www.parsonsbehle.com/publications/the-songhua-river-spill-china-s-pollution-crisis>.

240. Nat Green, "Positive Spillover? Impact of the Songhua River Benzene Incident on China's Environmental Policy," *Wilson Center*, July 7, 2011, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/positive-spillover-impact-the-songhua-river-benzene-incident-china-s-environmental>.

241. Kirschner and Grandy, "The Songhua River Spill: China's Pollution Crisis."

242. Green, "Positive Spillover?"

effort to control the situation, authorities ended up doing the exact opposite with a heavy political cost.

2015 Tianjin Warehouse Explosions

The 2015 Tianjin warehouse explosions continue to show the cost of local misgovernance event 10 years after the 2005 Songhua River benzene spill. Within Boin's framework, the 2015 Tianjin warehouse explosions case exhibits all three criteria: threat, urgency, and uncertainty. The blasts occurred in a major port city less than an hour away by train from Beijing. The threat of the damage the explosions and the ensuing fires could cause was of great concern to the government. Over 15 million people live in Tianjin and the blasts occurred less than one kilometer away from the nearest residential area, a distance not in compliance with existing industrial regulations.²⁴³ As such, the urgency to contain the flames and evacuate those near the blast site was also an immediate concern. Adding to the fire danger was the lack of information about the nature of the blasts in the first place. The government was unsure of the nature of the chemicals that had ignited and of the toxic fumes that were spreading around the blast site. Different chemicals

243. "Deadly Tianjin Warehouse Explosion: Review Leads to China Moving 10 Chemical Plants," *South China Morning Post*, February 15, 2016, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/1913250/deadly-tianjin-warehouse-explosion-review-leads-china>.

require different responses and authorities needed to figure out the appropriate measures to take, especially in regards to guaranteeing the safety of the firefighters sent to combat the flames.

In a general sense, the Tianjin blasts are a part of a greater problem; Beijing's ability to protect the health of its citizens while it encourages economic growth, enforce environmental and safety regulations on the local level, and cut down on industrial and economic related corruption. As mentioned earlier, a rising middle class has a greater interest in their general health and wellbeing. This demand will pressure and incentivize the government to both enact more regulations and enforce the ones in place. China has had mixed results with the latter. This "enforcement gap," described as the difference between the regulations and laws in place and their actual compliance or enforcement, has many different possible reasons. Most popular are the ideas that local governments might not have an interest in compliance and thus do not enforce regulations, that the perception of enforcement being difficult decreases efforts, and that enforcement agencies simply are mismanaged or lack the resources to carry out their jobs, which themselves are not always clearly defined. One case study of the enforcement gap in Guangzhou came to the conclusion that local government support was not the limiting factor, but rather poor coordination and perceived difficulty with enforcement.²⁴⁴ In addition, widespread corruption throughout China's economy poses another problem. In

244. Carlos Wing-Hung Lo et al., "Explaining the Enforcement Gap in China: Local Government Support and Internal Agency Obstacles as Predictors of Enforcement Actions in Guangzhou," *Journal of Environmental Management* 111 (November 30, 2012): 227–35, doi:10.1016/j.jenvman.2012.07.025.

this case, the chemical warehouses that caused the Tianjin explosions were located less than the mandatory one kilometer distance from residential areas – which in this case included two hospitals, a convention center, and apartments.²⁴⁵ The follow up investigation eventually charged Ruihai Logistics Company managers that owned the chemical warehouses and 25 local officials who accepted bribes to waive the relevant industrial regulations and municipal zoning rules.²⁴⁶ Similar circumstances are present all over the country.

The Tianjin warehouse explosions and the subsidiary explosions continued for almost two days. The initial two blasts went off at 11:20 PM on Wednesday, August 12. The Tianjin government then reported around 2:30 PM on Thursday, August 13, that the majority of the fire was under control.²⁴⁷ However, state media continued to report numerous explosions on Friday, August 14. According to Xinhua, Tianjin's fire department head announced early Friday morning that firefighters, "are still battling the raging fire."²⁴⁸ Over 6,000 residents have been evacuated to temporary emergency

245. "China Explosions: Fears Hundreds of Tonnes of Chemicals Remain at Tianjin Blast Site," Text, *ABC News*, (August 14, 2015), <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-08-14/china-explosions-fears-dangerous-chemicals-remain-at-site/6698058>.

246. "China Jails 49 for Catastrophic Tianjin Warehouse blasts," *China Daily*, accessed April 13, 2017, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-11/10/content_27328565.htm.

247. "Timeline of Tianjin warehouse blasts."

248. "Firefighter Rescued after Tianjin Blasts," *Xinhua Net*, accessed April 13, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-08/14/c_134516085.htm.

shelters, such as Taida Second Primary school.²⁴⁹ More than 1,000 firefighters and 140 fire engines were dispatched to Tianjin. The fires were not put out until 42 hours after the first blast.²⁵⁰ The military also sent troops to assist with the recovery and cleanup of the toxic chemicals. The day after the blasts, more than 200 military nuclear and chemical specialists arrived at Tianjin with detecting equipment to identify the chemical compounds that had been exposed.²⁵¹ Concerns over exposure to dangerous chemicals at the site proved to be true. More than 700 tons of sodium cyanide, a white powder that is fatal if inhaled, were found east of the detonation center and had to be handled by special military units on August 16. As a precaution, the authorities also evacuated residents within a three kilometer radius of the blast zone due to fears that wind might carry toxic chemicals towards residential areas.²⁵² Similar to other crises, Beijing sent a State Councilor to Tianjin. Chinese Vice Premier Liu Yandong visited blast victims Thursday night, wished them a speedy recovery, and held a meeting with the Tianjin authorities. Vice Premier Liu was accompanied by Minister of Public Security Guo Shengkun, who

249. Huey Fern Tay, "More than 6,000 Displaced by Tianjin Blasts," Text, *ABC News*, (August 14, 2015), <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-08-14/more-than-6000-displaced-by-tianjin-blasts/6699474>.

250. Ibid.

251. "Xinhua Insight: China's All-out Rescue after Deadly Blasts," *Xinhua Net*, accessed April 11, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-08/14/c_134513698.htm.

252. "China Tianjin Blasts: Evacuations as Sodium Cyanide Found," *BBC News*, August 16, 2015, sec. China, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-33945293>.

was in charge of a working group to respond to the crisis, and head of the National Health and Family Planning Commission Li Bin. However, it was only on Sunday, August 16, that Premier Li visited the city. Vice Premier Liu, while on the State Council and in the Politburo, was not on the Politburo Standing Committee.²⁵³ By then, the urgency of the crisis had ended as the authorities began implementing cleanup procedures.

The 2015 Tianjin warehouse explosions was an accidental industrial disaster that eventually led to the loss of 173 lives and almost 800 injured.²⁵⁴ Of those lost, 115 were firefighters or police officers. It was the deadliest industrial disaster since the Shaanxi mine collapse in 2008.²⁵⁵ The government response to Tianjin is notable due to the post-crisis chemical clean up, the delay in sending Premier Li to the city, the clampdown on critical social media, and the indictments of businesspeople and officials for the accident. Although Tianjin officials promised to clean up the chemical spillage due to the blasts, there were still pools of chemicals more than one year later. The delay in sending Premier Li to Tianjin, which is a short train ride away, was also telling on the government's part. The response to crucial posts on social media – shutting them down – was also a particularly heavy-handed approach. Lastly, the investigation and following trial was a flashy display of justice. As one of the most recent large disasters in recent years, the

253. "China Vitae : Biography of Liu Yandong," accessed April 13, 2017, http://chinavitae.com/biography/Liu_Yandong%7C267.

254. Jing, "Has China Failed to Learn the Lessons of Deadly Tianjin Explosions?"

255. Rishi Iyengar, "5 of China's Worst Industrial Disasters," *Time*, August 13, 2015, <http://time.com/3995600/china-tianjin-blast-worst-ever-disasters/>.

Chinese government response to the Tianjin explosions shows the problems Beijing needs to address and the solutions it's come up with.

The ugly side to China's miraculous economic growth in the past few decades is the country's high propensity towards being afflicted by industrial disasters. Such quick growth left environmental and industrial regulations behind, to the detriment of Chinese citizens. Industrial disasters continue to strike today, though not always as nearly bad as the benzene spill or Tianjin warehouse explosions. In April 2017, inspectors found that more than 470,000 tons of untreated sewage was intentionally released into Guangdong's waterways. This occurred even after the city has spent \$4.4 billion in the past four years to improve its water quality.²⁵⁶ The visibility of industrial waste has become increasingly visible to the Chinese public, particularly to the middle class. The daily blanketing grey smog of pollution and the contaminated river ways that were once the source of China's civilization are too massive for the CCP to hide. The problem of industrial disasters is linked to the inadequacy of regulation, enforcement, and the deep roots of corruption found within the Chinese system. It is the most visible result of a system without clear accountability.

256. "Raw Sewage Stinks Up Guangdong Waterways," *Caixing*, accessed April 16, 2017, http://www.caixinglobal.com/2017-04-14/101078605.html?utm_source=SupChina&utm_campaign=2380b51850-20170414-271newsletterCourtingTinyCountries&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_caef3ab334-2380b51850-163323109.

Conclusion

In each of these case studies, the Chinese government displayed similar patterns and behaviors when responding to the crises. As shown in the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, the government is able to mobilize vast state resources and seeks to prevent an image crisis through compassionate performance and repression. The CCP holds a monopoly on power and this seems to be beneficial toward the party's ability to coordinate responses to crises and disasters in general. However, it seems that the Party is continuously fighting a battle to maintain its performance-based image as the legitimate authority in China, which is threatened every time a disaster turns into a crisis.

The mass mobilization of state resources plays to the CCP's advantage when addressing disasters. As seen in the government responses to the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, the 2008 winter storms, and the 2016 floods, Beijing is able to mobilize large amounts of personnel, gather and distribute needed physical resources, exert economic authority, and dedicate vast sums towards relief and reconstruction. For the 2008 earthquake, Beijing was able to call upon 148,000 PLA, PAP, and militia personnel to respond to the disaster. When the 2008 winter storms struck, over 300,000 PLA troops and more than 1 million reservists were mobilized to provide snow relief. Beijing ordered at least 32,000 PAP members and an additional number of PLA units to respond to the 2016 floods. The Party's structural control over China's security services allows it to have an institutional advantage to mobilizing security personnel for disaster relief. In each disaster, PLA and other security personnel were generally sent to the crisis zones within hours of each disaster starting. For example, in the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake

over 6,000 PLA troops in the Chengdu Military Region were sent to respond to the quake in two hours. A few hundred specialist personnel were flown in from Beijing the same day. The central government thus has the enormous capacity in which to send these personnel to where they are needed by having the authority to mobilize any and all resources needed. This ability is, however, limited by the capability and infrastructure of the armed forces to mobilize vast amounts of troops. However, the numbers are still quite high. One report assessing China's armed forces mobilization puts the throughput capacity of the military for the Wenchuan earthquake at 206,769 troops per day and for the 2008 winter storms 554,444 troops per day.²⁵⁷ Throughput capacity is the total number of troops mobilized for relief operations divided by the average time those troops arrive at their destination. In essence, throughput capacity measures how fast the military can effectively call up personnel, assign them, and get them to where they needed to be. Therefore, the Chinese government was able to utilize over half a million security personnel every day, not including almost one million police officers, while responding to the 2008 winter storms.²⁵⁸ The subordinate position the military has towards the Party and central government has allowed mobilizations of such a large magnitude to take

257. Jeffrey Engstrom and Lyle Morris, "China's Armed Forces Respond to Internal Disaster Relief: Assessing Mobilization and Effort" in *The People's Liberation Army and Contingency Planning in China*, edited by Andrew Scobell, Arthur S. Ding, Phillip C. Saunders, and Scott W. Harold, 168, Washington, D. C.: National Defense University Press, 2015.

258. "Nearly 1 Mln Police Work to Ease Traffic Chaos in snow," *Xinhua Net*, accessed February 12, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-01/29/content_7518257.htm.

place whenever a disaster occurs. In addition, the Party, with over 86 million members, is able to bureaucratically mobilize needed personnel. The biggest example of this occurring was in the aftermath of the 2008 earthquake, when significant amounts of local administrative and party officials were incapacitated and not able to carry out their regular responsibilities. To make up for the deficit caused by the disaster, the CCP flew in officials from other regions. This dual mobilization, of first responders and administrators, has allowed the CCP to effectively respond to disasters in force.

Parallel to the ability to mobilize personnel is Beijing's capacity to gather and distributed physical resources. For the 2005 benzene spill, the 2008 earthquake, the 2008 winter storms, and the 2016 floods, the government made pledges to quickly provide material assistance and mobilized to do so. In response to the water supply crisis of the 2005 benzene spill in Harbin, the Harbin authorities shipped in at least 16,000 tons of bottled water to make up for closing the city's water supply system.²⁵⁹ Although citizens complained, the logistical feat was impressive and the panic in the city did die down. Vast amounts of material resources on a large scale were collected and distributed in all of the cases studied, besides the 2015 Tianjin warehouse explosions. But even for the warehouse explosions, around 6,000 people were provided with ad hoc relief in a school. Adding to the capacity for the central and local governments to mobilize resources are also the ultimate authority the Party has in controlling the economy. When the 2008

259. "Toxic Water of Polluted River Reaches Harbin," *China Daily*, accessed April 15, 2017, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-11/24/content_497399.htm.

winter storms struck, there was a dearth of electricity and energy in the afflicted regions. The central government in response made energy supply the key goal of their efforts and instructed a national reduction of power and diverted electricity to the troubled areas. When food prices began rising in afflicted provinces that had low food supplies due to either poor transportation due to the storms or extremely cold weather conditions, the local governments independently took efforts to impose price ceilings and ship food to the needed areas. At one point, Wuhan officials allowed trucks carrying vegetable to waive toll fees and gave over 100,000 low-income families a one-time subsidy to offset the rising food prices.²⁶⁰ In a similar fashion, after the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, Beijing ordered tent factories to produce big tents solely for disaster relief. In both situations, the authority government officials have over the economy and transportation allowed them to take drastic and immediate action. This even extended to the realm of technology, with local governments regularly partnering with telecommunications companies to send out emergency information through text messages. During the 2008 winter storms, the government sent out a total of 357 million text messages to the public.²⁶¹ Lastly, the central government earmarked significant funds towards recovery and relief in the aftermath of each disaster. Usually, Beijing allocates funds based on

260. "Vegetable Prices Rise in China as Snow Continues," *Xinhua Net*, accessed February 12, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-01/30/content_7527648_1.htm.

261. "China Continues to Suffer from Snow, despite Signs of Recovery," *Xinhua Net*, accessed February 12, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-01/31/content_7529615.htm.

province. As the 2016 floods subsided for example, the central government specifically gave the hard-hit Hebei Province \$37.4 million for recovery efforts.²⁶² On a larger scale, the partner support created in the aftermath of the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake paired counties within Sichuan Province with provinces around China. Wealthier provinces such as Guangdong were instructed to provide economic relief to the counties damaged most by the earthquake. This ingenious scheme, while very hierarchical and authoritarian, forced the supporting provinces or municipalities to donate one percent of their local financial revenue towards disaster recovery work in their respective counties.²⁶³ The centralization of power grants Beijing extensive leeway over disaster response coordination in terms of mobilization, economic behavior, and political policy. However, as discussed later, this does come with some risks, mainly that criticism over disaster management is aimed straight at the government.

The case studies also revealed a cognizant effort on part by the Chinese government to avert image crises. Mentioned earlier in the chapter on the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, image crises occur when an accused party is held responsible for an offensive action. In regards to disasters, Beijing regularly seems to undergo situations that might become, or contain elements of image crises. For example, in the 2008

262. “Xinhua Insight: China Strives to Battle Severe Floods, Challenges Remain,” *Xinhua Net*, accessed April 7, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-07/26/c_135542090.htm.

263. “Report on the 2008 Great Sichuan Earthquake,” *International Recovery Platform*, accessed November 28, 2016, http://www.recoveryplatform.org/resources/publications/199/report_on_the_2008_great_sichuan_earthquake, 6.

Wenchuan earthquake the CCP had to deal with two successive image crises. The first was negative international attention over how China handled the 2008 Tibetan protests. The prohibition of foreign media in Tibet led to international press relying on anti-Beijing information from Tibetan exiles. The successive image crisis was mainly domestic, and thus necessitated a more compressive response than the Tibetan-related image crisis. This was the image crisis over the shoddy construction of hundreds of school buildings that collapsed when the Wenchuan earthquake struck, killing thousands of children and teachers. In response to this second, potentially more damaging image crisis since it focused domestic criticism on the government, Beijing took several steps to prevent the image crisis from developing. This ended up including the targeting of critics, jail time for activists, online censorship, judicial obstruction and the enactment of restrictive measures to prevent protests and gatherings over the collapsed school buildings in an effort to prevent criticism, and responsibility for the collapses, from hurting the government image. The experiences and trials of activists Huang Qi, Tan Zuoren, and Ai Weiwei showed that the CCP was not afraid to use its usual toolbox of repression to stamp out criticism and carry out image restoration. Huang was sentenced to three years in prison and denied parole for “possessing state secrets.”²⁶⁴ Tan Zuoren had a closed trial that lasted less than five minutes and ended up with him in jail for five

264. “China: End Quake Zone Abuses,” *Human Rights Watch*, May 6, 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/05/06/china-end-quake-zone-abuses>.

years.²⁶⁵ Ai Weiwei was ambushed and beaten in his hotel by government security forces while on his way to advocate for Tan.²⁶⁶ Repression was also conducted online. State media began criticizing investigative articles of the collapsed school buildings after Zhou Youkang urged local officials to “maintain social stability.”²⁶⁷ After the 2015 Tianjin blasts, government censors punished 50 websites and over 300 social media accounts for “spreading rumors.”²⁶⁸ Any threats to the government’s image and response were taken seriously by Beijing.

Yet, the CCP also takes deliberately proactive, and to an extent pre-emptive, behavior to avert image crises. These lines of behavior would include emotionally-charged rituals, sympathetic public statements, positive disaster response reporting, and publicizing the care and remorse high ranking public officials have towards the crisis. Such action manifested itself most clearly in the aftermath of the 2008 Wenchuan

265. Jiang Shao, “Police Bar Public from Attending Trial of Earthquake Investigator Tan Zuoren,” *Amnesty International UK*, accessed November 26, 2016, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/blogs/countdown-china/police-bar-public-attending-trial-earthquake-investigator-tan-zuoren>.

266. “China: How Not To Respond to an Earthquake,” *Human Rights Watch*, April 14, 2010, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/04/14/china-how-not-respond-earthquake>.

267. Bin Xu, “Consensus Crisis and Civil Society: The Sichuan Earthquake Response and State–Society Relations,” *The China Journal* 71 (January 1, 2014): 105, doi:10.1086/674555.

268. Benjamin Haas, “China’s Disaster Playbook Falls Short in Tianjin Blasts,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, August 18, 2015, <https://www.hongkongfp.com/2015/08/18/chinas-disaster-playbook-falls-short-in-tianjin-blasts/>.

earthquake, with a display of compassionate moral performance. First, the CCP leadership was depicted in such a way as to present the Party's true sympathy for the disaster victims. Premier Wen went to the earthquake struck areas the night of the seismic event and was pictured walking around damaged areas offering his support and sympathy for those affected. His cultivated image as "Grandpa Wen Jiabao" defined the state's remorse and sincerity towards responding to the crisis, pre-empting claims of central government obliviousness or cold-heartedness. Similar visits by high ranking officials had occurred previously in the 2008 winter storms a few months before, but were not as emotionally-charged or sympathetic as Premier Wen's image after the Wenchuan earthquake. When the 2016 floods occurred, Premier Li took a 30-hour tour of the area with a similar message of hope and solidarity.²⁶⁹ However, his performance was not as memorable or emotionally sincere as his predecessor's. Second was the practice of rituals, which when performed and displayed properly emphasized the heartfelt sympathy high ranking officials felt towards the disaster victims. National mourning periods and the dissemination of images of the Politburo standing in silence at Zhongnanhai were engineered to substantiate the compassionate and paternalistic image of the state. This sort of ritual worked very well for such high-profile disasters such as the Wenchuan earthquake, which as a singular destructive event could be depicted as humbling for the leadership. Lastly, this perception spilled over into the image displays of the

269. "China Flooding Leaves Scores Dead and Missing," *CBS News*, accessed April 7, 2017, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/china-flooding-leaves-scores-dead-and-missing/>.

government's emergency response on a personal level. Pictures of soldiers clearing roads, police officers directing travelers, and exhausted rescue personnel sleeping on elevators garnered a sense of sympathy for the first responders, who were an extension of the state apparatus itself. Articles about old PLA officers slugging it out and emergency workers helping strangers, such as Jiang Xuaojuan, the breast feeding police officer, remade the disaster as a human, yet Chinese struggle. These narratives served to deflect criticism and fill the disaster discourse with sympathetic memes and stories. Image crises occur based on the perception, real or imaginary, of offensive actions or behaviors. By filling up state media and disaster discourse with such imagery, the CCP could hope to marginalize the perception of a failed or faulty response. This attempt even extended to foreign media, where whether by design or not, international journalists had unprecedented access to the Sichuan disaster areas. The openness of the press, or relative openness compared to the restrictive measure imposed earlier in Tibet, contributed to foreign media praising the CCP for how it handled the earthquake. In a pessimistic sense, this was a subtle manipulative way for the CCP to gain good press and boost Beijing's image among domestic and international audiences.

In addition to the government's capacity to address disasters in a sufficient manner and Beijing's ability to either evert or contain image crises, the vulnerable factor that warps disasters into crises is actually more subtle. In each case studied, there were public complaints over pre-disaster measures. For the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake, it was outcry over construction companies building school campuses that were not in compliance with earthquake safety standards. For the 2008 winter storms, the affected

public was angry over “a lack of preparedness” as one relief volunteer put it.²⁷⁰ Prior to the weather storms becoming unusually intense, officials thought it would end in a few days and the initial response made it seem as if the government was completely unprepared, especially since the storms occurred during Chunyun, the mass migration before the Spring Festival. Cities experienced losses of power while thousands of travelers were stranded. When the 2016 June and July flooding took place, citizens in several heavily afflicted areas expressed anger towards local officials for not warning them in advance. The most infamous of these was the situation at the town of Xingtai in Hebei. As the floods occurred, a local Party secretary remarked, to residents’ astonishment, on television that there had been “no casualties,” as a video of that particular secretary kneeling before families that had lost loved ones circulated on social media.²⁷¹ According to some Xingtai residents, the town chief gave warning of the floods while they began forming, leaving no time for them to respond appropriately.²⁷² The 2005 Songhua River benzene spill was a crisis directly caused by government mismanagement and failure to coordinate, to the extent that the spillover affected

270. Howard W. French, “Cold Chinese Grow Angry Over Lack of Preparation,” *The New York Times*, February 4, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/04/world/asia/04snow.html>.

271. “Anger Erupts Over Government Handling Of China Flood,” *NDTV.com*, accessed April 7, 2017, <http://www.ndtv.com/world-news/anger-erupts-over-government-handling-of-china-flood-1435190>.

272. “China Suspends 4 Local Officials After Deadly Floods,” *NDTV.com*, accessed April 7, 2017, <http://www.ndtv.com/world-news/china-suspends-4-local-officials-after-deadly-floods-1435476>.

Russia's preparations for the incoming benzene spill. Lastly, the 2015 Tianjin blasts took place in a chemical warehouse that was closer to residential areas than allowed by zoning rules in the city. Many blamed lax regulations and corruption for allowing such dangerous sites to be located so closely to housing areas. Dissected individually, each outcry is a local one, either due to provincial government mismanagement or corrupt practices. However, taken together these situations point towards an underlying factor that will continually hinder Beijing's ability to effectively deal with natural and industrial disasters. This factor is the political system itself, which is one without accountability that will repeat the vulnerabilities exhibited in each of these cases that have allowed them all to become crises. Enforcement of regulations could have prevented hundreds of school buildings from collapsing in 2008 and a chemical warehouse from exploding in 2015 with a force so strong it registered as a 2.9 earthquake on the Richter scale. Officials could have prepared for weeks of snow storms or flooding, two natural events that are not unique to China, if they were motivated to serve their citizens rather than their own pockets. Clear communication and accountability between authorities could have prevented the panic that became the benzene spill crisis. These situations happen, but the scope of the damage is exacerbated by the conditions in which these disasters take place in. An authoritarian one party regime held accountable to none, reliant on repression and growth based performance legitimacy, fearful of independent civil society, and made up of millions of members more motivated by personal advancement than public service will inherently stumble through each disaster if these base conditions do not change. The lack of transparency, the prevalence of corruption, the deprivation of independent investigative media, the normality of weak regulatory enforcement, and the absence of

bottom-up accountability impede any real movement by China towards a state of affairs in which natural and industrial disasters do not become crises. These disaster are not all even crises by and of themselves, but become ones due to the inherently faulty nature of a system that impedes its own improvement.

Appendix

国家减灾委、民政部发布近期全国雪灾情况通报

时间：2008-01-23 14:43

1 月 10 日以来雪灾分省受灾情况

省份	受灾人口	死亡人口	紧急转移安置人口	农作物受灾面积	倒塌房屋	损坏房屋	直接经济损失
	万人	人	万人	千公顷	万间	万间	亿元
湖北	780	5	7.2	481.3	1.1	3.3	14.3
安徽	300.9	1	0.4	150.9	0.3	2.2	4.3
湖南	636.4	——	7.7	300	0.47	2	8.3
重庆	184	——	0.2	——	0.22	0.45	0.54
四川	63	——	——	9.7	0.0097	0.09	0.7
贵州	474.7	——	——	91.7	0.023	0.27	2.17
河南	2.6	——	0.0025	1.8	0.007	0.0042	0.15

陕西	42.3	——	——	1.1	0.0243	0.146	0.68
新疆	2.9	——	——	——	0.0049	0.1	0.05
合计	2487.0	6	15.5	1036.6	2.2	8.5	31.1

“国家减灾委、民政部发布近期全国雪灾情况通报-中华人民共和国民政部,” *中华人民共和国中央人民政府*, accessed February 12, 2017,
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